柳実冬貴
対魔導学園
AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"
35試験小隊
7.逆襲の紅蓮
ファンタジア文庫

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7.Revenge to madness

Prologue

Four days after Takeru was transferred to the inside world.
In the outside world the Inquisition's interrogative committee had been held.
In the courtroom only the defendant's seat has been lit up, the judge executives' faces were shrouded in darkness and not visible.
The Inquisition's executives seats were installed in high positions and surrounded the defendant's seat, the accused was standing with handcuffs on her hands.
The accused, was Ootori Ouka.
She was charged with jailbreak and obstructing Inquisitors as well as assisting fugitives.
"Then, during the uproar you have acted arbitrarily by yourself?"
As one of the executives asked Ouka, she stretched her back muscles.
"Yes. The one who proposed the jailbreak was me. The captain was in opposition to it, but it could be said that I have forced it through. Other 35th Test Platoon members have only acted in accordance to my orders."
"I am the main culprit... is what you're saying."
"Yes. All the responsibility lies on me, that is what I mean."
As Ouka stated that clearly, one of the executives has laughed appalled.
"Don't be stupid. The captain is Kusanagi Takeru. You have no authority to give such an order. In the first place, your subordinates wouldn't follow it."
"As you might know, the 35th Test Platoon has grown a great deal after I have enlisted in it. It's a shame to say so while being one of his comrades, but Kusanagi Takeru cannot be called a good student even as flattery. It could be said that the subordinates trust me more."
Ouka spoke undaunted even in front of the executives.
"That's some rebellious behaviour towards your Captain."
"Test Platoon members are students. There is no ranks, and the hierarchy is only a formality, disobedience is not a crime."
In response to her attitude, one of the executives sigh echoed.
"Watch what you say. You won't get off with just imprisonment. Normally, you should have been sentenced to death you know?"
"I am aware. Do not worry, I intend to accept any sentence given to me."
"...I know that you are trying to take all the sins upon yourself. We won't tell you, a minor, to compensate with your death. However, there is something like joint responsibility——"
"You will not kill me because I am the Chairman's daughter."
As she spoke rudely, a commotion broke out among the executives.
Ouka didn't withdraw. A real interrogation wasn't this relaxed. She realized it was just a farce long ago. After all, the executives are mere puppets. A while ago there were people from the so-called dissident group as well as the Ethics Committee in here.

However, they have been picked out during the unrest that happened over the past few months.
Right now in here, there were only henchmen of the Chairman, Ootori Sougetsu.
Even the way this interrogation committee will proceed was already decided by Sougetsu. The underlying motive was to post-process the matter of Kusanagi Kiseki and the battle with Fantasy CultValhalla confidentially. Speaking of what Ouka could do, it would be ensuring that responsibility does not fall on her comrades.
"You sure talk well miss, as expected of Chairman's daughter."
She stared at the executive on in the centre of the interrogator's seats.
In there, was a figure of Sougetsu desperately trying to stop himself from laughing by placing his hand on his mouth.
Ouka directed her blade-sharp glare at him.
"Did I make a mistake in your upbringing... no, not at all. It's the result of looking up huh."
Sougetsu placed his legs on the desk and rest his chin on his hand.
As if looking at an ant under his feet, he looked down on Ouka.
"Ouka, what they are saying is reasonable. They aren't trying to bully you here."
What Sougetsu meant, was that even if she's the Chairman's daughter they won't show her sympathy, as if that was an actual fact.
One of the listening executives cleared his throat, in response to that Ouka snorted loudly.
"Just as Ouka says, it is a fact that I don't want to sentence my own daughter to death, but as the Chairman I cannot let her go free of charge. Covering up the criminal acts of my relatives wouldn't be allowed by my Inquisitor's pride."
Hearing the word 'pride' from his mouth, Ouka frowned in annoyance.
Seeing her expression, Sougetsu drew a disgusting arc with his mouth.
"With that said, I have no time to preoccupy myself with a mere test platoon. You have been told already weren't you, Ouka... the enemy has already invaded our domain."
Ever since Takeru disappeared Ouka was confined in a solitary cell, there was no way she could know the current situation.
She was told that fact only a few hours earlier.
Sougetsu's smile disappeared, and he carefully spoke of it.
"Currently, the Grey City and the border have temporarily fell into the witches' grasp. Both the KnightsSpriggans and the Witch HuntersDullahan are devoting themselves to city defence. The forces on the front aren't all that numerous."
"...how great are the enemy forces?"
"Above 2000. Magical weapons have been confirmed. The number might be small, but each of them being a witch changes everything. The threat is considerable."

"With only that much, we should be able to overwhelm them with our numbers. Instead of waiting, we should assault them before they prepare their formations. It's not time to fear the sacrifices is what I think."
"The enemy has developed transfer magic, they use teleportation to move instantaneously. Considering that fact, it's possible that they will transfer their troops directly to the contraindicated area and Inquisition's facilities. It is not possible for us to weaken the defences of the city and the academy."
While what Sougetsu said sounded reasonable, Ouka speculated something different from that. The failure of Kiseki's convoy operation was without doubt orchestrated from the very beginning. In the first place, it was weird for Kirigaya Kyouya to be appointed to the role of Kiseki's escort. Sougetsu should have been able to foresee in advance what actions he would take. He must have also predicted Valhalla's assault.
She didn't know yet what was the reason for inviting such large-scale destruction into the city, but the following raid of troops claiming to be 「Pureblood Party」 was too convenient for him.
The overlapping issues of witch forces and Kiseki's matter were processed as terrorist acts. By calling these occurrences terrorism Inquisition used them to obtain support and materials.
So he won't finish the enemy forces quickly in order to prolong the fight? Is he trying to divert the public attention from something...? There's definitely something happening behind the scenes.
A crackling sound could be heard from her clenched fist.
The more she thought about it, the more the shadow of this man called Ootori Sougetsu's has been cast upon it all.
It was always like that. The more she tried to explore it, she could understand less and less what's hiding behind that disgusting smile of his. Ouka was puzzled about it ever since she was taken in and welcomed as his adoptive daughter.
She didn't know why he would pick up a orphan completely unrelated to him.
She was grateful to him for giving her an opportunity and the strength for revenge.
However, she could only think that there was something behind every single move of his.
"That's the current situation. We can't afford to put anyone in the prison or anything like that."
Sougetsu leaned forward, placed a hand on his chin and smiled.
"Therefore, you 35th Test Platoon members will be undergo a special punishment."
"Special punishment...?"
"What, don't brace yourself like that. I think it will be quite beneficial punishment which will help you grow. Experience, if anything."
Ouka watched Sougetsu and listened to his judgement.

Still smiling, he opened his mouth.
"From tomorrow onwards——you will join Spriggans and Dullahans on the frontlines and suppress the enemy together."
"...wha.....!"
That order was beyond Ouka's imagination.
"The equipment and ammunition limit of the test platoon is lifted. I don't mind if you use whatever you want, anything you request will be provided to you."
"Impossible! That can't be! It's unheard of a test platoon made up with students to go on the frontlines!"
"Not really? The students have helped to defend during the Hero terrorism, this time too, we allow those who volunteer to defend the city to do so."
"There should be enough forces even without using the students!"
"Of course. That's why I said it from the start, this is the punishment imposed upon you. With this, your sin... and Kusanagi-kun's sins can be written off, that's quite cheap isn't it?"
In response to Ouka who was at loss for words, Sougetsu responded with a cool expression.
"I look forward to your activities. Do your best and survive. That too, is for Kusanagi-kun's sake you know?"
The light disappeared, and Sougetsu's figure turned invisible.
Ouka clenched her fist and tried to withstand the chagrin, imagining the crisis that will befall the platoon in the future, she cemented her determination.
Until Kusanagi Takeru comes back... I will protect the 35th platoon no matter what. She thought.

Chapter 1 - Battlefield

After Christmas in December, during the failure of Kusanagi Kiseki's convoy operation a section of the town was swallowed by Hyakki Yakou and suffered serious damage. The contaminated section was still closed, and only Inquisition officials as well as several Alchemist employees knew the situation inside.
The casualties were unknown, but without doubt about three thousand people were missing. Among them was Kiseki's brother, Kusanagi Takeru.
Responsible for Ouka who fainted, Ikaruga and Usagi avoided the waves of Hyakki Yakou and arrived at the partition walls. And when they were almost swallowed by the surging red meat, suddenly the meat activity has ceased. It has collapsed like ash, thanks to that, the platoon members somehow survived.
However, Ouka was restrained and taken into custody by Inquisition, Usagi and Ikaruga were examined while placed under house arrest in the HealerSeelie ward.
They were set free a week after Takeru's disappearance.

And, two days after it was decided that the 35th Test Platoon would participate in the strategy against Pureblood Party.
Ouka and the others were in the north-east of the Grey City, in the tent of the seventh company's standby station on fifth line of defence.
Although the Grey City was unused because of its proximity to Sanctuary, it was now devastated even more than before. The collapse of buildings progressed, and gunshots echoed all over.
This place has already turned into a battlefield.
"Hit-and-run troop...is it?"
Ouka who has participated in the briefing was told what will be the role of the 35th Test Platoon in the strategy.
The commander was a man entrusted with the seventh company.
"That's right. You don't have to listen to my orders. You can move freely."
"I've heard that we will be under the command of the company's commander but... is there a meaning in having us as a hit-and-run troop?"
"Our goal is the enemy's destruction. With that as your goal, just act accordingly. However, make sure not to get out in front. You'll hinder the company."
"...but."
"That's all from me."
The company's commander faced the document on the desk, and glared at Ouka only once before he left the tent. Left behind, Ouka looked at the white board on which the strategy's summary was written and spat out a deep sigh.
"...don't get in our way, is what he means huh."
In short, that's what the company commander meant.

Since it was the Chairman's orders he reluctantly included the 35th Test Platoon in, but it wasn't weird for him not to know what to do with them. And there was no reason for senior troops to accept the student troops sent to them by the Chairman.
They had no choice but show their ability to the seniors despite the handicap and get acknowledged by them.
"....."
The enemy's borderline invasion plan has already started, the Inquisition was caught off guard and they have occupied the Grey City.
However, starting from that point the movement of Inquisition was fast, as if expecting it the Spriggans sortied, and created a line of defence. They succeeded in preventing the invasion on the city and its facilities.
Although the inhabitants were evacuated, there was almost no damage to the city. Since the other borders weren't attacked, it seemed like the enemy's strategy had been limited to the Kanto region.
There wasn't much information about the enemy. When they tried to take prisoners, they would immediately commit suicide.
However, this abnormal situation didn't seem to inspire a sense of crisis. There wasn't any formal announcement, but the world was already conscious of it.
That... the war has already begun.

——A magic bullet exploded in front of her, and Saionji Usagi instantly hid her body in the building's shadow.
Immediately after a solidified lump of magic hit the building, the debris fragments grazed her cheek, her body was covered by the rubble.
Her consciousness faded for a moment. She felt no pain in her body, but because of the roar and impact a severe ringing resounded in her ears.
"——ji! Saionji! Are you okay?!"
Usagi woke up when she heard Ouka's voice through the wireless and while struggling she crawled out from under the rubble. After poking out her head from inside, she took a deep breath and chocked as the dust entered her lungs.
"Geho... I-I'm all right."
"That's great...!"
"There was too many shields and I couldn't aim well, I moved too close... I will be careful thereafter."
"After the bombardment just now the enemy has began to withdraw. If they move, Saionji, you cover the Spriggans. I'll continue wiping them out from the sky!"
Usagi mustered her strength and wiped her face that turned white with her sleeves, after confirming the state of her rifle she aimed it forward.
And then, she was shocked.
On the road ahead coloured with white, there was a number of red spots.

It were the remnants of the Spriggan troop whom they were covering. A mere mass of red meat was scattered making up reds spots on the road covered with white concrete dust. The spots were spread out all over the place, and the white world was dyed with red.
"...uuu...!!"
Seeing the lives be lost in front of her, Usagi's face cramped up, she hugged the gun and curled up.
"I-it's al...l right... I-I am n-no longer... weak...!! This much is nothing!"
Even as she attempted to inspire herself, her body wouldn't move and her vision was distorted because of tears.
Although she somehow managed to hold down the hyperventilation, she was unable to stand up anyhow.
"Why... I should have overcome it...!!"
Usagi chewed on her lower lip and closed her eyes tightly.
"Kusa...nagi...!!"
In this situation which compelled her to cry, Usagi quietly said the name of the one who saved her.

In Witch Hunter form, Ouka expanded the crimson mantle like wings and flew. She noticed that Usagi looked weird and landed on the roof of a decaying building.
"Saionji...? Are you injured?!"
Hearing her sobs through the wireless, Ouka swallowed a breath.
Usagi didn't reply. Ouka tried to move over to her to rescue, but a voice has reverberated in her eardrums.
"Leave Usagi as she is. Try to look around and recover the troops if possible. You would only worsen her state."
"What do you mean, Suginami. Saionji might be injured!"
"Since you can't understand what I mean, it's a no. Eradicate the remaining enemy forces."
"But!"
When Ouka shouted into the wireless, Ikaruga spat out a sigh.
"They still haven't contacted us, but the 4th Company and 5th platoon were almost destroyed by the sweep of magic bullets bombardment from a while ago. There probably won't be any bombardment on us. Headquarters' priority will be rebuilding the troops, right."
"....!!"
Ouka gasped, fifth platoon was the troop Usagi was covering. It's a blessing in disguise that she survived the bombardment, the troop itself was destroyed.
With a large amount of deaths, Usagi must have been mortified.
It wasn't improbable. No matter in how much carnage was she involved in, the only real battle experience Usagi had was during the incident with Alchemist's fifth laboratory.

At that time both the enemy and allies were boarding the Dragoons, but this time there was a large number of flesh-and-blood soldiers in a confined space. It must be her first time to see that much death.
It's wouldn't be weird if she was frightened.
We should have worked together at the beginning. I was too impatient to be recognized by the veterans. I tried to use the maximum potential from each one of us but...
Although they could trust in her skills, Usagi didn't have the mental strength required for independent actions on the battlefield. Even for Ouka, it was the first time to battle under such circumstances.
She had even less experience as a captain. The test platoons were originally consisting of six people and Inquisition troops were consisting of ten. It was impossible to raise up to the veterans with just *four people*.
Even so, that's not an excuse for exposing the members' lives to risk.
If it was Kusanagi... I wonder if he would have done better.
She recalled the abilities of Takeru who was originally the captain.
Other than close combat his skills were horrible and he hardly could be called an excellent commander, but he did well supporting everyone mentally. The individual abilities of the platoon members were excellent, the most important thing to bring out their potential was not directing the combat but the cooperation and mental support.
If it was him, no matter what the situation was he would have encouraged Usagi.
How shameless... I'm embarrassed for saying that Kusanagi is disqualified as a captain.
I am the one disqualified, she thought dispirited.
It was at that time, a roar sounded in the street's vicinity and smoke raised up.
Ouka admonished herself for falling into melancholy, expanded her wings and set up her gun.
"Vlad, can you perform a search?"
"I'm not a searching type... fuh, but do not belittle me. I can at least perceive the smell of blood."
"Stop boasting! Hurry up and do it!"
"Despite completing the contract thou still hath the foul mouth, have thou not..."
Vlad grumbled complaints while performing a search operation.
Ouka's sense of smell picked up the scent of blood from the radius of one kilometre.
"The smell of witch's blood is different. The magic that's mixed in their blood makes the flavour different. You can call it a shadow... of course, that is if enemy is bleeding."
Just as she has been told to, she inhaled and the choking smell of blood stimulated her nose.

It was the proof of how much blood has flowed through the Grey City.
Whether it's witches or inquisitors, death was overflowing.
Ouka separated the smell of the death and the living, then analysed the quality of the living enemy's smell.
Among the enemies remaining in the vicinity, she sensed an alien scent.
It wasn't a witch holding a normal magic power.
"Ancient Property HolderAncient Wizard...!"
"They destroyed the troop and holding the point delayed us while they escape. They are prepared for suicide together with the inquisitors... something like that."
While Vlad spoke of his guess into her ear, Ouka communicated with Ikaruga.
"Can you do reconnaissance with an UAV? I want to know the witch's exact position."
"It's been destroyed long ago. It's something that came with provisions so it's performance was poor and it wouldn't fly too high, slow and useless."
"That's not like you..."
"We had only two days to sortie so spare me that. I wasn't even able to supply Usagi with weapons. I'm not working that fast."
That's understandable, thought Ouka.
Even if she can use the supplies as she pleases, it's impossible for her to improve it in 2 days.
Ouka gave up on the reconnaissance and flew over the explosion site.
Immediately after she took off from the building's roof, a magic bullet has grazed her cheek from the side.
A witch riding a catalyst in the distance was aiming a sniper wand at her.
Ouka flew while swaying from side to side and aimed her gun's muzzle at the witch. Another shot, the moment magic bullet has grazed her head, Ouka changed her stake into one with specialized performance and released it. Although the trajectory was distorted since she was in flight, she has predicted the deviation of this degree.
The magic stake hit the flight catalyst and the witch was carried to the ground.
When she looked around, she saw the enemy's remnants gather in the direction the Ancient Wizard was struggling.
It was their final resistance. She felt they launched a suicide attack.
"Vlad! Is the enemy communicating with magic?!"
"There is a barrier up. It's impossible to decipher the operative procedure."
"Khh."
"No point eavesdropping. And give up on requesting them to surrender. There's no need for mercy for folks who intend to die."
Ouka herself knew that already.
However, she wondered why wouldn't they understand that it's meaningless to fight if the main force has already withdrew.

There being more sacrifices in this place was not beneficial for either side. She grew impatient. Injecting magic power, Ouka shot down the witches that gathered at the centre. The Spriggan personell on the ground has started intercepting using anti-aircraft guns and the battle turned into a dogfight.
"What about *him*? Where is he and what is he doing?!"
Ouka shouted, asking Ikaruga.
"Who knows. He turned off the wireless when the operation started. He's going off on his own. Just like you used to."
When she was reminded of her old self, Ouka was unable to refute.
Another explosion has rose up. She dived down, following the enemy.

"URRaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"
On the street with black market stalls lined up, a man in a red robe who had one eye crushed has roared. Sky blue magical circle rotated vigorously under his feet, and the magic was invoked. Two Spriggans standing in the stalls' shade shot towards the man, but were covered with a semi-transparent membrane. The Spriggans inside of the membrane were in dismay, and fired towards it. The bullets ricocheted on the inside and penetrated the Spriggans' bodies.
Their breath grew faint inside of the membrane, Spriggans tried to fight back with their handguns, but the Ancient Wizard opened his palm in anger, then made a fist with it, as if crushing something.
Immediately after, the membrane covering the two was compressed and the Spriggans inside of it have shrunk into a size of a golf ball all at once.
The moment magic was released, the membrane ruptured splattering pieces of meat and blood all around.
"The Compression property...!"
One of the Spriggans understood the situation peeking out from behind the building and tried to report the enemy's property to all the troops using the wireless.
However, at the next moment the membrane appeared on the building he was hiding behind.
The film compressed the building all at once. The building itself has been condensed and turned very small.
The Spriggan who lost his hiding place tried to escape from the spot, but it was in vain.
When the Ancient Wizard opened his fist, the compressed building burst out all at once because of the pressure.
The debris from the broken building have been blown away with momentum of a cannonball and destroyed all the obstacles around the Spriggan. As if exposed to bombing, the surroundings have turned into rubble.
Only one person survived the explosion in the place. It was a Spriggan who had blood flowing from his damaged armour.

The Ancient Wizard was looming towards him as he reached out seeking help.
"Haa... haa... where are your company's headquarters...!"
His breathing was rough, his eyes bloodshot, he asked the Spriggan.
"Hel...p..."
"I asked where!"
"...I don't want...to...die..."
Seeing the Spriggan beg for help the Ancient Wizard clicked his tongue and mercilessly covered his body with the membrane, then crushed him.
Not even trying to wipe the blood that splashed into his face, he walked down the street.
There, landed Ouka clad in a crimson armour and mantle.
At the same time as she landed she aimed Vlad and confronted the enemy.
"Stop fighting at once! There's nothing either of us will achieve with this!"
"....."
"Don't you get it?! You are already surrounded by us! It's the matter of time until the remnants are overwhelmed! There's no point sacrificing any more lives is there!"
".....just now, did you say 'no point'?"
As Ouka desperately tried to persuade him, the Ancient Wizard's body trembled in anger.
"Our struggle, our sorrow... how dare you say there's no point to our revenge!"
When the man's pupil was clouded with hatred, Ouka felt a chill.
She wasn't intimidated by his anger. Seeing the same thing in his eye, she felt as if she stared in the mirror.
"! Dispel the magical circle immediately! My Relic Eater can penetrate any magic! I won't miss at this distance!"
"I'm not afraid of a fake Magical Heritage! I'm perfectly fine with taking an EXE member with me! I'll prove to you that our struggle is not in vain!"
The sky blue magical circle rotated vigorously in response to his roar and turned humongeous.
It was clear that he was trying to use some kind of large magic.
Ouka hesitated for a moment, but rather than aim Vlad's muzzle at his head she shot towards his feet.
Although the protective barrier was expanded, Vlad's stake blew away his foot.
The man's posture broke and he fell to the ground.
However, the magical circle didn't disappear. He endured the pain and continued to prepare the operative procedure.
No choice but to kill him...!
Even as she turned herself into a demon and directed the muzzle at him, her vision has blurred.
Don't be a coward Ootori Ouka! This is war. You've done worse things until now!

She scolded herself and placed a finger on the trigger.
That's when on top of the man who fell over a green shadow suddenly fell from the sky and grabbed the man.
The shadow grasped the man and raised him up, then turned its face with a bored expression at Ouka.
"Hesitating in front of the enemy? Ain't that different from what the EXE folks told me. You've turned soft, Ootori."
"Kirigaya... where were you until now."
"Why do I have to tell ya anything. You ain't my boss."
"...I'm the captain."
"Temporary one, right? Also, I ain't havin' no intention of entering the small fry platoon."
"By the Chairman's orders, you are under my command. I won't allow acting on your own."
Ignoring Ouka's words, Kirigaya Kyouya squeezed the man's head until a creaking sound came out.
The man raise a voice of agony feeling pain in his skull and the magical circle under his feet disappeared.
"Operative procedure is something you make up in your head right? Then makin' him feel some pain in his head should work."
In response to the man's screams, Kyouya laughed.
"There's no reason to kill that man now... it'll be fine just to restrain him."
As Ouka moved towards him trying to stop him desperately, Kyouya looked as if he didn't understand what is she talking about.
"...what's up with that reasoning? Those guys came at us prepared to make a suicide. They'd rather die in action rather than be imprisoned right."
"It's forbidden to kill the prisoners if not necessary. Hurry up and let him go."
".....ha. Fine then, there ya go."
With a blank look, Kyouya threw away the man by his head.
The man fell down on his knees. Ouka cancelled the Witch Hunt form and ran up to him, she immediately tried to capture him with the Gleipnir, that moment.
He had an instant charm that was prepared in advance.
"——I'll purify your bad blood!"
Ouka tried to aim for the man's hand in a hurry, but before she could do so Kyouya's shotgun, Nero has spewn flames. In front of her, the man turned into a blood splatter along with the gunshot. Ouka fell on her butt and looked up at Kyouya's face.
Kyouya put the gun on his shoulder and looked down at Ouka with appalled expression.
"...pitiful. Did you fall that much because of Kusanagi? Where did you, who held the nickname of Crimson PrincessCalamity go I wonder."
"....."
"...ridiculous. I was an idiot for having expectations."

Looking sideways towards her in contempt, Kyouya turned away while hitting his shoulder with the gun.
Ouka's pupils shook in chagrin and she looked up at the sky while taking a deep breath.
It was cloudless and blue. The unbalanced amount of gunshots raising up to the sky decreased to one every few minutes, and they were gone before long.
Just by looking at the veterans one could understand that it was Inquisition's victory. Throughout this fight Inquisition's front pushed slightly forward and occupied the venue with the black market. There was no doubt that they were driving the enemy away day after day.
However, right now the other side had a geographical advantage. The Border and Grey City isn't just the surface, but also the underground. They no longer used subways and underpasses, supply passageways and transportation made before the war. Not even Inquisition was able to get a grasp on that space that was left alone for a long time.
The surprise attacks from underground caused the Inquisition's side to suffer casualties nearing 100 soldiers. Initially the number of Inquisitors neared 5000, but it went down to 3000 members.

After few hours, the company's headquarters moved to the intermediate point between the Border and the Grey City. The Inquisition's camp was made in the vicinity of black market.
Ouka walked through the camp while holding a cardboard full of supplies. She heard a scream of an Inquisitor who was undergoing treatment in the aid tent and her gaze moved in its direction.
The inside of the tent was full of Inquisitors receiving treatment. The patients were bandaged and lied down on the bloodied beds, ones with relatively minor injuries were sitting on the ground. Since there wasn't enough HealersSeelies the Spriggans were helping out with things like pressing the patients down and cutting bandages.
...I wonder when will the reinforcements come.
Although it's been just three days since they came here, not only they didn't raise up to the veterans, the situation has deteriorated.
She heard that the fifth line of defence was still all right. On the second, and the third lines of defence there were reports of Magical Dragoons... HeroesEinherjars attacking. They have been destroyed by the EXE members, but even the personnel with the latest models of Dragoons were not a match for them, or so she heard.
Ouka was horrified at the thought of the Einherjar attack in the state they were in at the moment.
The fifth line of defence had no EXE members. There were Relic Eater contractors, but after being absorbed by Mistilteinn, Vlad wasn't in the best shape and couldn't be relied on.

Speaking of the other contractor, it was Kirigaya Kyouya who had a trend of acting arbitrarily.
He was brought to responsibility for violating the instruction during the previous convoy operation, then demoted, disposed of and assigned to the 35th Test Platoon. It meant that his circumstances were exactly same as Ouka's when she first came to the 35th platoon.
I wonder if I was the same as he is now...
She recalled the time when she was relentlessly chasing down enemies. Back in these days she wouldn't let them surrender and immediately shot them. Right now, she changed her way of thinking and did her best to capture the enemy. Rather than because of ethics, it was because she obtained many things.
Killing, meant robbing herself of all the other choices. That's what she learned in the 35th platoon.
...it's troubling. Am I even fit to be the captain...?
On top of being unable to show off the members abilities on the battlefield unknown to her, a troublesome thug has been enlisted in the platoon.
Above all, the main problem was Takeru not being there.
Ouka too, felt as if there was a gaping hole in the centre of her chest.
"...Kusanagi..."
Noticing that she unconsciously spoke his name, Ouka closed her eyes and shook off the hesitation.
Right now I have to think only of surviving. Until Kusanagi comes back, I will protect this platoon.
Bracing herself, Ouka headed towards where her comrades were.

When the supplies arrived the situation calmed down.
The Inquisition has taken a step forward, but it was assumed that the enemy ahead of the fortifications was aiming to recapture it, fortunately, the enemy didn't come. Both sides must have been exhausted. It was unknown whether the other side was being resupplied or not, but the enemy side that was away from their home grounds was supposed to be in a predicament.
"Haa..."
While under the hot shower, Usagi just hung her body down instead of washing herself. Because among the supplies there was a car with a shower, she used it with appreciation.
Usagi was ashamed of being terrified by the death of her allies. For her who held the role of a sniper, it was the first time she touched death from close range.
It was a failure on her part for thinking that she had already overcome it.
Pathetic. Like this I will once again be a burden to the platoon. Of course, Usagi was aware that the death wasn't the only cause for what happened.
"...Kusanagi."

While hot droplets soaked her face, she dreamed of his back. It's been already a month since he last pat her head. She was so lonely she felt like crying.
That's when.
"Maidenly sentimental!"

Suddenly, a hand appeared from behind and grasped her chest.
"Whuaah?!"
"So it's a reversal to a bunny who'll die out of loneliness isn't it. Very well, I'll rub your boobs until you're all happy."
"Suginami! Think of other's feeling a litt——hiiaaaa! Where are you pinching?!"
While pressing her chest on Usagi's back, Ikaruga rubbed and pinched her chest, messing around with her until she was exhausted.
Usagi's cheeks were dyed red and she started leaking out a lovely voice, that's when Ikaruga closed her eyes and spoke into her ear.
"More or less, I can tell how you feel... no, I understand your feelings. You're lonely without Kusanagi, right?"
"T-that's not...!"
"Even if you try to act strong, in a situation like this it can't be helped right? I'm lonely as well."
Aside from the fact that she was massaging her chest, Ikaruga's voice was gentle.
"It's all right. He's definitely alive. I guarantee you that as the one who knows him the longest."
When Ikaruga stroked her wet hair, tears appeared in Usagi's eyes.
"But... you don't know that do you."
"I know. Nikaido is with him too, that man won't die alone somewhere separated from us and his little sister. He will definitely come back."
There was no anxiety in her voice.
"What we are supposed to do now, is survive until he comes back. Get a hold of yourself. If you die in a place like this, he will think it's his own fault. That's why, even if you are to crawl on the ground, survive."
Seeing Usagi nod, Ikaruga made a small smile.
"Well, we are not necessary to the company and were told that we can move as we want to, even if we don't participate in combat——"
"——That won't work."
A voice came from the side of the shower room in which Ikaruga and Usagi were in embrace.
The two could see Ouka who imperceptibly appeared and placed both of her arms on the wall on the height of her chest, taking a shower. "Tch." Ikaruga clicked her tongue in response.
"...there's a limit to being unable to read the mood."
"I don't want to be told that by someone who sexually harasses others on the battlefield... that's my personality. Forgive me."
"You're going to tell us to fulfil our responsibilities as Inquisitors after all this time? Despite all the disservice he did to Kusanagi's little sister, you intend to continue being Chairman's dog?"
In response to Ikaruga's words riddled with thorns, Ouka downcast her eyes sadly.

"I have no such intention. I know that there's no worth in swearing my allegiance to the Inquisition. However, we are being monitored and can't move as we please."
"...you're talking about Kirigaya aren't you."
"Yeah. He's supposed to be Kusanagi's acquaintance, Suginami, do you know any details about him?"
When Ouka asked, Ikaruga ran her fingers through her wet hair and spat out a sigh.
"We were in the same class since middle school. Same for Kusanagi. His personality... well, I'd like to say that he's mediocre who's only talk, but I guess he's the type who diligently piles up effort to raise up. He's been blinded by his effort and doesn't see his shortcomings, but he was quite outstanding."
"...so he changed after the mock battle tournament, huh."
"That was the crucial moment. At the very least, he wasn't hostile like that and didn't hurt others. He was getting on Kusanagi's case for no reason, but at first they got along pretty well, those two."
"Is that so...? I can't even imagine that."
Recalling how he was insulting Takeru during the mock battle tournament's second round, Ouka said.
"Kusanagi was an unfortunate genius who clung and strived with his swordsmanship and Kirigaya was a jack of all trades who tried to overcome the fact he was merely ordinary. For good or bad, both of them were reckless daredevils and understood each other. However, since Kusanagi's personality changed Kirigaya started to hate him one-sidedly. I guess he couldn't accept Kusanagi lowering his head to others. Well, still, it's not a reason to turn into someone who'd try to kill his little sister like that."
Seeing Ikaruga stare into the distance nostalgically, Ouka squinted and rinsed her hair.
"So, the enemy of the 15th platoon... is it."
"There's the case of Yoshimizu Akira, his childhood friend who wanted to become a Seelie. I wonder if it's true that he contracted with a Relic Eater and imparted its healing ability to her."
Ouka recalled Kyouya's vengeful eyes and turned off the shower faucet.
"I wonder if we can pull Kirigaya to our side..."
"...are you serious?"
Ikaruga opened her eyes wide in surprise and looked towards Ouka, who explained the idea with a hand on her chin.
"Since he's the monitor sent by the Chairman, if we appease him we should be able to move. If his purpose is the revenge, there's nothing in it for him to stay with the Chairman. Just like it was in my case."
"....."
"...Kirigaya's eyes are the same as mine were half a year ago."

Ouka was the same, obsessed with revenge and dedicating entirety of her life to it. The one to melt her frozen heart was Takeru. Since she was able to stop herself, she thought that there's no way Kyouya can't do it.
Usagi who was being hugged by Ikaruga shook her head to the sides energetically.
"That man killed Kiseki-san didn't he? If not for him we wouldn't have ended up like this...! Ootori, do you want such a person become our comrade?!"
What she said was correct. Ouka also thought the same.
But that doesn't solve anything.
"I didn't think of having him become our comrade, but it should possible for us to cooperate if our interests match."
Also, Ouka added.
"If Kusanagi was here, I think that's what he would do."
"...I don't believe it...!!"
Unable to deny Ouka's words, Usagi left the shower car. Ikaruga smiled wryly towards Ouka.
"Honestly, I'm against it as well. Nothing good will come out of getting along with such a runt."
"...I guess so."
"However, you are the captain now. I will follow your orders."
Ouka looked up in surprise hearing Ikaruga's words. Ikaruga shrugged and hung the bath towel on her neck.
"But make sure to at least solidify your strategies. Trends and countermeasures are the basics of teamwork. I'll tell you this, give up on trying to make me persuade him, that's impossible. Even if it's possible for me to destroy the human relationships, it's impossible for me to build them."
"Uuu... in that aspect I'm similar."
In the platoon, Ouka was the one with the worst communication skills and persuasion was a challenge for her.
"You're the one who brought it up, you do it. Think of a method to persuade him by yourself□."
Ikaruga followed Usagi and also left the shower car. Taking their place was different personnel who was waiting their turn.
Changing her thinking to try and relax for the time being, Ouka began to wash her body. Since she didn't know when the shower car would come again, she decided to savour this precious luxury.
After all, Ouka too was a girl. She wanted her body to be clean at all times and was sensitive to body odour.
Especially ever since she entered the platoon.
She washed her arms, then sides, and when she started to rub the foam on her chest, suddenly——
"How nice... being young is nice... there's that firmness in the right places."

After Ikaruga and Usagi left the shower, a mysterious woman appeared inside and said such a thing with an envious expression. Surprised Ouka was taken aback.
She showed wariness to the woman who peeked into the shower and she has seen for the first time.
Black hair in short bob cut. Large eyes, the woman had young features.
Ouka wasn't acquainted with this woman at all. Who is she.
"W-what is it?!"
"Haa... they're big too. Your hair is beautiful, that perfection deserves jealousy. Dammit... were I a bit younger I might have been able to challenge it. Still, no matter how tough the men act, I think they all prefer big breasts... how deplorable."
Even as Ouka questioned, the woman just pouted and continued to repeat "Enviable" or "I'm so jealous". Then, she just turned forward and started to wash her body.
"Um... are you from the company? Did we meet somewhere before...?"
The woman didn't answer, just covered herself in foam, ignoring her.
What's up with this woman... on top of being over-familiar, there should be a limit to acting at her own pace.
No matter what she was told, Ouka couldn't help but think that. She decided to hurry up and wash herself, concentrating on the shower.
Then she noticed there was no one under the showers around her.
Being alone with this woman felt awkward.
Ouka wanted to leave the shower as early as possible.
"——Hey, what's your relationship with captain Kurogane?"
She was startled, suddenly asked something like that. The woman didn't look towards her and only soundly washed her body.
"...ha? Captain Kurogane? Why do you know such a... can it be that you're from EXE...?"
"Please answer the question, Ootori Ouka-san."
"Even if you ask for our relationship... I have been in his care during my time in EXE, or rather, he was my senior officer..."
After saying that much, Ouka realized that the woman has said her own name and tensed up.
"Don't worry, I'm not one of the Chairman's pawns. I just can't comprehend it. Why is that Mr. Sulky Face concerned about you if all you were his subordinate."
While saying something Ouka was unable to understand, the woman cast her a sidelong glance.
"I'm Oonogi Kanata. I took your place and entered the EXE, I was formerly a CovertBanshee and now am a Dullahan."
"So you're from EXE after all... why here? Reinforcements for the 7th company?"

"I have been asked by the Captain to see how the 35th Test Platoon faring. Since he's flying around the battlefield, he's unable to visit himself and made me check on it instead."
Even if that sounded like the truth, Ouka wasn't convinced.
Kurogane Hayato was worried about the platoon's safety? Why?
"Even if you ask me why, I can't tell you since I wasn't told anything either. For me personally, rather than to check on the platoon, I wanted see what you looked like instead."
Being glared at, Ouka faltered.
"...I don't understand what you mean, the relation between me and captain Kurogane is between that of a former boss and subordinate. While he might cherish his comrades as their captain, there is no reason for him to dote on me now."
When she glared back in return, Kanata seemed to determine that she was not lying and has backed down.
"Well, fine then. That should be it for confirming whether you are safe or not."
"...you came here just for that?"
"No. I have been entrusted with a message I'm going to tell you now."
She said so and turned towards Ouka.
The reason there was no one in the shower was probably her using her authority as an EXE member.
Kanata lightly cleared her throat and spoke the message entrusted to her by Hayato.
"There's no longer any reason for Inquisition to hold you hostage in order to use Kusanagi Takeru. Shake off Kirigaya Kyouya and run away to the specified location. Run away from there. After that, do whatever you want."
"....."
"...or so he said."
Going as far as to imitate Hayato's voice, Kanata finished relaying the message.
By the way, it didn't sound like him at all.
"Umm... I don't understand at all. Please explain the circumstances. What does that mean?"
"Run away, it's all right as long as you understand that. Also, this. The memo with specified location. Now then, that's all."
Kanata raised her arm and while holding a bath towel she tried to leave.
Ouka tried to stop her in a hurry, but before that Kanata herself has stopped moving.
"It's fine if you don't involve yourself in combat any more than this... as an adult I do think so. As long as you survive, the conclusion will come one day. Whether Inquisition or Fantasy CultValhalla will win then is unknown, but you should hide until the world settles down."
"....."

"If you wish to protect your comrades, then even more so. Fighting is the job of adults."
After saying that, Kanata's figure disappeared.
Literally, she disappeared the moment Ouka blinked. Left behind, Ouka grasped her fist and downcast her eyes, thinking of what to do for her comrades as their captain.

Ouka left the shower car, her wet hair was exposed to the dry wind as she walked through the camp.
When she stopped on the square the distribution of food was carried out, the conversation of several Spriggans sitting around the fire entered her ear and she stopped her feet.
"Enemy is resisting strongly... but the forces we have now we should overwhelm them in mere five minutes."
"No, the Einherjars haven't appeared here yet and the Ancient Wizards are still further in the back. Just like that 「Compression」 property guy... if they come at us with all they have, it's over."
"The higher-ups won't give us any pretty reinforcements either. Just because they are afraid of the transfer magic is not a reason for that is it...! We're already getting used to this...!"
Ouka wiped her hair with the towel and listened to the Spriggans.
The anxiety was spreading throughout the company. It wasn't a good tendency. The motivation on the battlefield directly influenced the circumstances on the battlefield. When the three Spriggans were swearing, one person who was curled up holding a rifle spoke with a trembling voice.
"...I've heard a nasty rumour from the Banshee members. That the guys who were scouting the enemy territory at night were all wiped out..."
"? Entire squad being wiped out is nothing out of ordinary. Even more so if it was the Banshee troops."
"No, wait. I've heard that as well. Certainly, the guy who survived said something right...?"
When the two Spriggans said so puzzled, the man who was curling up held his gun more strongly.
"The place was in a plight that made you want to avert your eyes. The flesh and blood, terrible smell was drifting. The survivor said that they were attacked by the enemy ambush."
So what? The guys around him looked at him in wonder.
The enemy forces seemed to kill everyone indiscriminate whether they were friends or foes.
"Did they fell into confusion on the battlefield? That's quite a nasty story..."
"Wrong. That wasn't it, probably. The enemy appeared from underground there was no light in, every one of them was crying while having a big smile on their faces."
"....."

"No... I don't want to die, they said so while laughing and crying at the same time. Even as they were showered with bullets, they jumped forward like beasts. Their nails were peeled off, arms broken and they bit until their teeth were broken."
All the Spriggans who heard the story forgot to breathe.
"Both the enemies and allies died out, and the last person who survived stood in the centre of the tragedy... he said that he saw a woman who looked like a ghost. The woman moved towards the survivor and whispered into his ear."
"...what did she...?"
When the guys around gasped at that question, the man with the gun raised his face and painfully spoke.

" □Laugh□ "

Ouka realized something when she heard that story, and expressions disappeared from ther face.
"The survivor told the story to the troop that rescue him while laughing, he bit his tongue and died. Just like the enemy, he went "noo" "I don't want to die" and so on..."
The man holding a gun finished the story while shuddering and bit his lower lip.
All the Inquisitors who listened to it spat out the breath and laughed to hide the fact they were scared.
"...t-there's lots of urban legends like that aren't there?"
"Rumours like that appear quite often on the battlefield."
They tried to change the topic quickly, but among them one person squinted with a meek expression.
"...I've heard about it before. Certainly, in the Inquisition's database there's a record of such a witch existing. A bizarre murderer who caused incidents regularily about ten years ago..."
Continuing, he spoke that murderer's name.
"Nicknamed Laugh Maker. The witch uses mind contamination magic and is specified as A-class danger... certainly, it was very similar to the situation that troop has encountered."
"Then that witch... wasn't caught yet?"
"No, she has been arrested once already... but has escaped from jail despite being put inside of an Iron Maiden. Afterwards, the Dullahan continued to chase after Laugh Maker——"
That's when Ouka grabbed the Spriggan's shoulder from behind.
Ouka grapsed his collar and forced him to stand up to her height.
"——Tell me about that in detail."
"W-what's with you all of a sudden?!"
"Just tell me. Where did the squad encounter her? Speak."

"...aren't you from the test platoon that participated under the Chairman's orders? You bitch, how dare you act towards your superior——"
Immediately after he made a nasty expression, Ouka glared directly at his face. There was no anger in her eyes, only a flame that looked like flames of hell from which dead reached out.
The Spriggan who experienced carnage many times over the years saw that kind of eyes many times.
People who lost their comrades. A witch who did suicide bombing. People holding children and suffering in the Border.
They were eyes of people who lost something, pupils with commitment dwelling inside. Revenge. It was the determination to live only for one that reason.

Chapter 2 - Comrades, or Revenge

The Alchemist's first laboratory was in the mountains far away from the urban areas, other than the officials and workers the entire neighbourhood was off limits. Unlike the other laboratories, this place was taking care of weapons development beyond level 5, dangerous and inhumane experiments were carried out in here.

However, unlike the fifth laboratory which was arbitrarily managed by Suginami Isuka, this one was authorized by the Inquisition.

"As expected, the work proceeds fast, Suzaku-san."

Ootori Sougetsu watched the spectacle that spread out on the other side of the glass and nodded satisfied.

A grey-haired woman stood beside him and had a great, proud smile.

"That's a matter of course is it not? On top of a legitimate reward existing, the Alchemist does not betray the expectations of their clients. We have already started mass production, we should be able to finish it before the battles in the Border finish."

Praise me praise me, the Alchemist company's representative director, Suginami Suzaku snuggled up to Sougetsu.

Sougetsu pushed her away with his hand and stared down at her coldly.

"Instead of providing a finished product, for you to come up with a demand for fuel supply... as usual, you're being a model mad scientist aren't you."

"You should already know the Suginami's philosophy right? We are using a system of a company in order to raise funds to continue our studies. The organization has continued to act neutral to make sure that political struggle and power struggles don't inhibit the research. As Suginami's, we require the fuel and funding for the research."

"...now that you have changed your mind and become our exclusive, that philosophy of yours isn't too convincing."

When Sougetsu said so, Suzaku went "how rude!' and puffed up her cheeks.

"I promised to cooperate with you because you gave me full authority over the research on the Hyakki Yakou! I have no interest whatsoever in who is going to win this war!"

Suzaku started to pout and flail her limbs wildly, which in turn stirred disgust in Sougetsu.

That appearance of hers when she sulked after her philosophy was made fun of really looked like that of a child.

The Alchemist corporation had dangerous human beings called Suginami. In particular, the woman called Suginami Suzaku has distinguished herself among them and was on another level compared to all other Suginamis.

Among the 【Artificial GeniusesDesigns Children】 holding the Suginami genes, Suzaku was the only heretic that possessed magical power.

"...is the research on Hyakki Yakou progressing?"

When Sougetsu asked, Suzaku's eyes sparkled.

"Yes of course! Those cursed things are really interesting! Although the reincarnation mechanism hasn't been clarified yet, we have found a method to control it. We thought that it would go well once we cut its connection with the soul, but the Hyakki Yakou curse is really thorough. When the link with the soul expires, the demon bodies die."
"Then, you mean to attempt on controlling it while maintaining the soul of Kusanagi Kiseki. Hyakki Yakou should act accordingly to Kusanagi Kiseki's will. Even my Innocentius was unable to take it away. Did you find a method?"
Suzaku waved her finger in front of him denying that.
"There is no magic nor technology required to control it. Or rather, nothing of that sort will work on a monster like that. If there is a gap to exploit, then that would be Kusanagi Kiseki's mind."
"Mind... so not the soul, huh."
"Human mind too, is similar to a machine. It reacts if you give it an electrical signal, and it's possible to cure it with electricity. You should be quite knowledgeable on the topic of controlling human nature, right?"
"....."
"The hint is dreams. And the rival in love for her beloved Onii-chan.."
Winking, Suzaku started to act cutely. Sougetsu shook his head and sighed.
"I see. You have disgusting hobbies."
"Oh, you like it? That kind of things."
"No. Certainly I might be a scum, but I don't like to lie."
"Don't say things you don't mean. Aren't you a human full of lies? Or rather, whether you are a human or not is doubtful in the first place."
"At the very least, this is how I really feel. Rather then lie to the human mind, I'd rather always say the truth. Even when I spit out lies, they are always close to the truth."
Sougetsu joined his arms behind his back and turned around in a twirl.
"For the time being, rather than take care of Hyakki Yakou, please hurry up and mass produce what I asked you for. The resistance of enemy forces is more intense than I expected. It's necessary to provide some forces in order to reassure the public."
"As you wish. The *mass produced Relic Eaters*... they will be ready before long."
He looked back only once, looking at Suzaku who stood behind him with a fearless smile.
On the other side of the glass, a spectacle similar to hell has spread out.
Far behind Suzaku, there was a plant with incubators lined up. It looked like a test tube filled with green liquid, naked people were placed inside and have passed through the tube.
All of them were witches and sorcerers arrested by Inquisition in the past.
"Thank you very much for providing the fuel. Normally to produce Magical Heritages with an artificial personality would require many years of technologic process and necromancy, but with that many sources of magic

and fresh brains, we are able to make weapons easier to handle than conventional Magical Heritages. There is no longer a need to rely on spirits and human souls any more. After all, it's all replaced by living humans."
The humans inside of the test tube were moved directly towards the incubator.
After being integrated into equipment that was in the upper part, all of it turned into a black case. On its surface 「The Malleus Maleficarum Production Model “Guillotine”」was engraved.
"Even now you can enjoy yourself and test them."
Cheerfully and proudly, Suzaku laughed boasting of her achievement.

Ouka has questioned the Knights, but wasn't able to obtain any decent information.
While biting her nails, she stared into the ground.
——Laugh Maker was the enemy who killed her family.
She has caused multiple incidents in the past, and was a bizarre killer who plunged the city into fear. Although she was arrested once, she got away while being transported, and at that time Ouka's family was killed.
It was a witch chased by the Inquisition for many years. When she was a Witch HunterDullahan Ouka looked for her as well, but no matter how desperately she tried to collect information about her, she was unable to get a grasp on anything.
"Ootori?"
Hearing a familiar voice, Ouka raised her face.
It was Usagi who sat near the campfire, and looked up at her.
Unconsciously she seemed to have walked towards the tent of the 35th platoon. Usagi was boiling water on the fire and stared at Ouka with a frightened expression.
Ikaruga who sat nearby asked Ouka why was she glaring.
"...sorry. I got lost in thoughts. I've got the ingredients. It's mostly rations, but there's consommé, some canned beans and meat. If you mix it all some soup should come out of it."
"Ootori... did something happen?"
She removed the ingredients from the backpack, meanwhile Usagi peeked into her face anxiously.
When Ouka tried to excuse herself, Ikaruga squinted while sipping coffee.
"You... don't realize what kind of expression you're making now?"
"……?"
"Your expression is eerie enough to make it seem like you're about to go kill someone."
Ouka tried to touch her own face, and noticed that she was tensing it up with all her strength.
Ikaruga was amazed by the fact that Ouka didn't notice it herself.
"You look just like you did half a year ago, you're scaring Usagi so stop that."

"S-sorry. I wondered about a several things to do in the future and my expression naturally turned stiff."
Ouka squat down on top of a concrete block and warmed her hands by the fire.
"Saionji, can you make anything with what I gathered? I'm hungry since I've been moving all day long."
As she asked with a thin smile, Usagi nodded, finally relieved.
After confirming the ingredients Ouka brought, Usagi wonder.
"...so it'll be difficult with those after all."
Ouka's shoulders drooped, but Usagi puffed her chest strongly.
"Don't look down on me, relying on the ingredients is second-rate. Maximizing the taste of the ingredients to the limit is a requirement needed to become a good wife, Grandmother has taught me that."
And with that said, Usagi took out cabbage and tomatoes from her backpack.
"After we have occupied the black market I have secured the vegetables left behind. They would rot away if they were left alone anyway."
"Woah, amazing. You should get a medal for that."
After obtaining praise, Usagi started to cook while humming.
She hung over two pots over the fire, one for the soup, the other one for warming up the canned food. While she was boiling the water, Usagi cut the ingredients on the wooden board.
Although her expression was much better than it was during the combat, Ouka knew that she was forcing herself. As if trying to atone for freezing in front of the human death, she did her best in cooking at the very least.
Ouka thought that her attitude where she didn't raise a single complaint was admirable.
She thought of apologizing to Usagi for making her act alone, but she gave up on it. She didn't want to make Usagi's effort and bravery go to waste, just as Ikaruga said, if she speaks poorly she might only hurt the other person.
While watching the flame, she tried to suppress the boiling feeling inside of her chest.
...just how selfish am I.
Biting on her nails while hugging her knees with her arms, Ouka admonished herself.
This is not the time to move for my own sake. I have comrades I need to protect... until Kusanagi comes back I will...
Even as she thought so, the hatred swirling inside of her didn't dissipate. Even now she wanted to search for Laugh Maker and attain her death in the most brutal way she could think of. The face of her little sister on verge of death wouldn't fade away from her head. Like a curse, it eroded Ouka's nearly-cured heart.
"...I don't know what you're burdened with there, but I can't calm down seeing it."

Suddenly, Ikaruga said so.
When she raised her face, she saw Ikaruga scrutinize her expression.
Usagi too, looked at her anxiously while cooking.
In response to that, Ouka hurriedly fixed her facial expression.
"It's nothing. I'm just a little tired."
"You're horrible at lying. Despite everything, we've been half a year together. It's expected that we'll notice."
"...that's unusual. Are you worried about me?"
When Ouka said so jokingly, with a straight face Ikaruga has,
"Of course I am. Is that bad?"
Clearly said so. Ouka opened her eyes widely and was dumbfounded just like Usagi, who dropped the spoon she was stirring the hot water with.
"...what's with that reaction of yours."
"N-no... nothing, sorry. I'm just happy."
"M-my apologies. It just didn't fit you whatsoever."
"Let me tell you this, I'm not only worried about each of you, but also about the Small Fry Platoon itself as a whole. If you are out of shape like this, I feel like we won't survive."
I'm sorry, the two apologized reflecting on it. Ikaruga made only a slightly discontent face and ran her fingers through her long hair.
"Leading in is so troublesome. I'm definitely the type who's getting frustrated by all the foreplay, surely."
Ouka was puzzled as Ikaruga started to say vulgar things.
Ikaruga spat out a sigh and said.
"Let's use this moment to make it clear."
"...what is it?"
"My past."
Ouka gasped.
"I promised when we were going to help Kusanagi's little sister, right? When it's over I'll explain everything."
"...you're right. I was in a hurry back then and forgot."
"I'll tell you everything about me."
Ikaruga placed a hand on her chest and spoke listlessly.
Ouka didn't think that Ikaruga who hardly ever spoke about herself would reveal such a thing.
"Don't worry, I'm not trying to make you feel compelled to share your pasts. I just want to get it off my head."
After saying so, she started to speak.
That she was born as a result of Alchemist's □Designs Child□ experiment.
About her best friend Isuka and the experiment on elves they did together.
About making an elf child called Kanaria, and that after awakening to morals she had escaped the facility.
About the uproar in the fifth laboratory a few months ago, Isuka dying and learning the fact that Kanaria was alive.

About creating the taboo 「Philosopher's StoneNanomachines」 and embedding them inside of her own body.
In response to hearing her horrific past, Ouka and Usagi were at a loss for words.
"Until now, I only had an interest in my own life. I thought that it's enough if I protect the place I belong to. But, I still have the feelings I have put aside. There's still a burden I need to carry."
"....."
"That's why, I'm here right now. I have a reason to fight. But I have no intention of participating in combat any more than necessary. By capturing the enemy, I will surely find out where Kanaria is."
After she finished speaking, Ikaruga spat out a small breath.
"It's fine to respond by blaming me. I'm one of the criminals Ootori genuinely hates, and a heretical magical creation is embedded in my body. You can arrest me if you want, I'll resist though."
In response to Ikaruga's words, Ouka shook her head.
"...I have no such intention. The Philosopher's StoneNanomachines might be something dangerous, but it is a fact that their power has saved us before."
Even as she tried to recall it, Ikaruga's development has always been unnatural. She created weapons with precious anti-magic materials normally unobtainable and contributed to fighting of the enemies.
Surely this and that was created by the Philosopher's StoneNanomachines.
"If I were to judge you like that, the ones using Relic Eaters would also be guilty. The power of magic can be good or bad depending on who uses it. You surely wouldn't abuse it. I think that power is something you should have."
If it was her from the past, she definitely wouldn't say such a thing.
This too, was all thanks to Takeru... or rather, to Mari.
Mari's attitude towards magic has changed Ouka.
"Well, that's all. My secrets have run out. It feels better than I thought it would."
After she said so, Ikaruga clapped her hands as if she recalled something.
"Ah, there's one more, a suuuper important secret."
" "?" "
"——You see, I love Kusanagi as a member of opposite sex."
Usagi and Ouka were in daze for a moment, but they immediately sprung up.
" "No way?!" "
"Is it that surprising?"
In response to Ikaruga's questioning look, Ouka spoke with difficulty while looking away.
"I-I was sure that you... um... aren't interested in men."
"I swing both ways you know?"
It was an unpleasant confession.

"I-I knew that your everyday skinship with me is a joke but... of all things, Kusanagi...!?"
"How rude! My skinship with you isn't a joke! I'm serious?!"
"Even if you deny that, that's how it is and I don't like it!"
"Well, even so, the one I love as a member of opposite sex is Kusanagi. Sorry, but I already have forcefully taken his lips away, intentionally."
" "Whattt?!" "
Usagi and Ouka didn't commit a double suicide nor were calm, but if she said forcefully it meant that Takeru didn't want it to happen.
((No, I wonder about that?))
"Ufufu, somehow the mood turned similar to a school trip□"
Ikaruga watched over the two who were still suspicious with a lewd smile.
Probably because of Ikaruga's confession which acted like an ignition agent, Usagi looked up after a moment.
"...I-I too will tell everything. You already know the circumstances of my household, but I didn't tell you anything about my trauma."
While sitting straight on top of a blanket, Usagi spoke with difficulty, her shoulders trembling.
That she was the daughter of the mistress and she was looked down upon by people in Saionji household. About the fact that she killed her older brother in an accident and was continously blamed for it ever since. And that she was cornered by Shinmeiji Reima.[1]
"The engagement with Shinmeiji Reima has been called off when he went missing. The decline of the Saionji household has been halted... I think that's a good thing. But I realized that Saionji household is not where I belong, one day I will become a proud and independent Inquisitor, and will take revenge on them. When I become much stronger, I will show that family what I'm made of."
Revenge. Even if the word is the same, the essence of Usagi's and Ouka's revenge was different.
Usagi's correct way to exact revenge looked dazzling to Ouka.
"A...and for that sake I cannot afford to blunder like today."
With a slightly tensed up expression, Usagi scooped up the soup and poured it into aluminium cups.
Her hand holding the laddle was trembling, which in turn resulted with a rattling sound.
"A-a-also i-in the f-future I w-will b-become Kusanagi's bride! That is my intention!"
With a bright red face and flustered expression, Usagi confessed the most important part.
However, neither Ikaruga nor Ouka were surprised whatsoever.
"W-why aren't you surprised?!"
In response to Usagi who was upset by the unexpected reaction, Ouka smiled wryly while poking her cheek with a finger.
"No... well... I realized that while listening to the story just now."

"Wasn't that obvious already? I didn't think you would go as far as make a bride declaration though."
Hit by Ikaruga's and Ouka's responses, tears appeared in Usagi's eyes.
"Fuee—□□□□?!! Since when?!"
"From the start. Yes yes, don't throw a temper, you'll spill the soup."
Ikaruga took a cup with the soup from Usagi.
Ouka took a cup from trembling Usagi as well and wrapped her palms around it.
Warm. When she ate a mouthful, she started to doubt whether it was really instant or not. She hasn't eaten anything since yesterday, but now she realized that she was hungry.
Before she realized, Ouka already regained her composure and thought she was faint hearted.
The one being saved was her. While she decided to protect the 35th platoon, the one being saved was actually her.
And yet, all she had in her mind, was revenge from her past...
She felt so pathetic, a wry smile spilled out on her face.
The one who thinks of the platoon the most, might actually be Suginami...
She probably had a good understanding of her comrades mental state.
And that Ikaruga spoke of her past to Ouka.
If Ouka doesn't speak in here, it will turn out as if she really was unable to read the mood.
"...I was an orphan. Before I was taken in by the Chairman, my name was Mineshiro Ouka."
When Ouka started to talk of her past, Ikaruga tilted her head puzzled.
"Mineshiro...? At the very least, I knew that you were Chairman's adopted daughter, though."
"Even though I say that, Mineshiro isn't my real name either. Mineshiro was the name of the household that took me in first, making Ootori the second one. I don't know who are my real parents. Exhausted both physically and mentally I was brought to the orphanage, and for long time I remained nameless."
It was the first time she spoke of herself since she spoke with Takeru.
As she continued, Usagi and Ikaruga listened to her in silence.
"The name 'Ouka' was given to me by the Mineshiro family."
While hesitating, Ouka recalled her cloudy memories.
——The dazzling everyday life and the despair of her heart broken.
——Killing her family with her own hand and the story of her hateful enemy.
In response to Ouka's horrific past, Usagi and Ikaruga remained silent.
Ouka placed the cup on the ground after drinking it all and smiled wryly.
"Sorry... it's not a story that should be said during a meal, right."
She tossed wood from a damaged building into the fire and held her knees.
It was a weird feeling. Embarrassed, relieved, it weren't feelings like that.
She was slightly apologetic. Hearing of the past of a human like her must have been a nuisance, she thought.

"...I see. So that's the reason you're acting strange today."
In response to Ikaruga's realization, Ouka tilted her head puzzled.
"Your enemy——she's on this battlefield, right?"
In response to Ikaruga's bullseye, Ouka downcast her face. I really don't want to make this girl my enemy, she thought.
"Laugh Maker... I already knew of the incidents she caused in the past, and I've heard the rumours that she might be in this place."
"...it's a rumour. It's unconfirmed."
As she spoke with her eyes closed, Ikaruga placed a hand on her own chest.
"You want to take revenge on her, right?"
"....."
"I'll give you a hand then."
Ouka looked up in surprise.
"After all, we won't get any decent treatment in here anyway. We were told we can act as we please, so it should be fine if we go and subjugate Laugh Maker."
"But... we really don't know whether she is here or not."
"If we don't all we need to do is search for her. If we continue like this we'll just die here. The enemy is nearby and we aren't moving, it's better if we take some lives."
Ikaruga narrowed her eyes slightly and held her fist in front of her chest.
"After all... if I learn that Kanaria is nearby, I will borrow your strength and go look for her. Kusanagi too has borrowed our strength in order to save his little sister, right?"
"....."
"Well, you are the one to decide."
Being entrusted with the decision, Ouka chewed on her lower lip.
"I-I shall help you as well! After hearing the story, it's impossible for us to do anything else! Let's crush that anomaly no matter what!"
Usagi wiped the tears that appeared in her eyes and said so clearly.
Ouka thought that she shouldn't have spoken of it after all. She didn't want sympathy and help in exacting her revenge.
She was happy. The fact that the two acted so aggressively for her sake made her so glad she could cry. For Ouka who had no friends, the two were already an important, irreplaceable existences.
But, that's why Ouka——
"——That conversation, include me in it."
A voice came from behind a collapsed building.
When their gaze was directed in that direction, they saw Kirigaya Kyouya leaning with his back on the wall slightly above them.
He had no smile on his face, nor was there any mockery on it.
Just the pupils harbouring flame of hatred sparkled, just like Ouka's used to.
"...Kirigaya Kyouya! Eavesdropping is a disgusting hobby!"
Usagi stood up and glared menacingly at Kyouya.
"Shaddup, pull back you critter."

"W-w-whatt?!"
Not sparing the raging Usagi a glance, Kyouya moved away from the wall. He moved closer to the expressionless Ouka, threw away a bandoleer and pierced the ground with a light machine gun as if it was a sword.
"You want revenge on your enemy right? If that's the case, I'll cooperate with you."
Hearing that unexpected proposal, Ouka felt suspicious.
"...what's with this turn of events. You're supposed to be our watchdog aren't you."
"That shitty didn't order me to watch over you guys. I never said I won't cooperate with you."
"Even so, there is no reason for you to help me in my revenge."
When Ouka directed a sharp stare towards him, Kyouya returned her an even more heinous one.
"The revenge is the meaning of my life. If you want to embrace the hate for magic, there's no reason for me not to lend you a hand. Our goal is the same, if we cooperate it'll go faster."
"Unlike you, I don't hate all the magic."
"That doesn't matter. As long as you bear the same hate I don't care."
Kyouya spoke as if there was no lies in it and stared straight up at Ouka.
"I can understand your hatred. Because I'm the same."
If she refuses here, probably Kyouya would be disappointed with her. The prospect of him turning into their ally would be for naught. Ouka closed her eyes and thought for a moment.
And immediately came up with a conclusion.
"...I'm sorry. I'm happy you feel so, but I don't want anyone in the platoon to act alone."
Usagi was surprised, but Ikaruga nor Kyouya were. Ouka continued.
"It's reckless to invade the enemy territory with just us. I don't want to involve you guys in my personal revenge."
"You're being distant. Ootori, until now you have lent us a hand in resolving our personal matters. Are you saying you can't trust us?"
Usagi spread her arms widely and said so.
But Ouka shook her head.
"Saionji... that's not it. I trust you guys from the bottom of my heart, I won't hesitate when I need to ask you for help."
"...then why?"
"Even if my revenge is accomplished... the ones I do it for aren't in this world already."
Hearing that Usagi was speechless and fell silent.
"My reason for fighting is different from yours. It's not like Saionji's future, a person Suginami wants to save nor Kusanagi who wants to save his little little sister who's still alive."
"...but..."

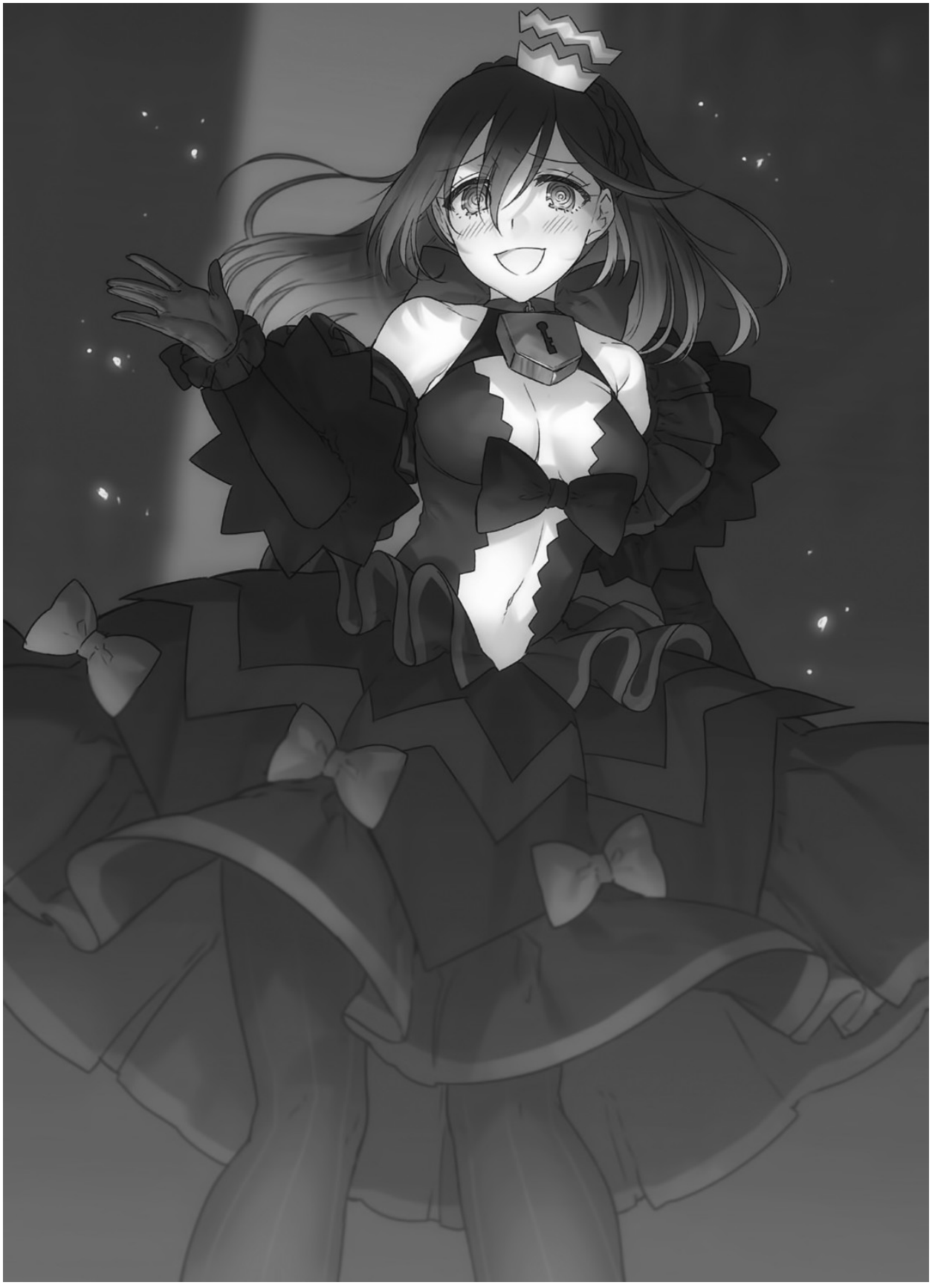
"Of course, I intend to have my revenge. In order to appease my family's chagrin and to sort out my own feelings I'm not going to quit. But involving you guys in this situation... is unproductive. I don't want to lose you all only to have revenge. My top priority is to protect this platoon."
Usagi understood Ouka's feelings, sat down by the fire and hung her head down. Ikaruga too, didn't say anything and just smiled thinly.
Those were Ouka's true feelings. If there was someone to save, she would have borrowed the power of her comrades. If there's an enemy in front of her, she would take revenge together with her comrades.
But now it wasn't the time for that. Protecting the platoon was the highest priority.
"——I'm not convinced by this. Are you the same as Kusanagi?"
Kyouya directed a glare full of murderous intent towards Ouka.
"While feeling hatred deep inside, you gonna hide it all behind a mask? Why can't you understand that's impossible. Hatred burns you from inside and while burning through your body and dissolving it, surfaces outside. If you don't discharge it, it will ruin everything eventually."
"It's not the time for that now. Revenge is not the priority."
"Don't fuck around! Unlike me, you have your enemy right up close you know?! What else is there to do other than ditch everything else and go slaughter her! No matter how you smooth it over and try to guise yourself as calm, it's clear that you're not fine with it on the inside!"
Kyouya lost himself in anger and shouted. From his perspective Ouka's situation was something to be envious of. His enemy, Haunted, was not here. He was unconvinced by Ouka's decision.
Ouka understood that very well. And even though she understood that, she still shook her head.
"I'm different from you, Kirigaya."
"How can I be wrong...! No matter how strong you are, that's how it should be!"
"That's not it. I'm not saying you're wrong, I said that I'm different from you."
Kyouya frowned, unable to understand what she meant.
"Because the one you want to save, is still alive.
"———!"
His hair stood up, and he grit his teeth soundly.
"Yoshimizu is still alive. You should fight not for revenge, but in order to save her."
"...that's Akira's clone! The real one is already dead! Even if her body and memory is the same, her soul is not! She's a different person!"
Waving his arms, Kyouya denied Ouka's words.
Ouka was unfazed and quietly exploited the contradiction in his actions.
"Then why are you imparting the Relic Eaters healing ability to Yoshimizu's imitation?"
"! It has nothing to do with you...!"

"Rather than revenge, shouldn't you give Yoshimizu a priority? Isn't saving her your highest priority goal?"
Kyouya made an increasingly steep expression and shook his fist.
"There's definitely a way to save Yoshimizu. If you wish for that, I'll help you."
"...shut up..."
"Right now, you are a member of the 35th Test Platoon in a way."
"——Don't look down on me!"
He shouted, took the light machine gun from the ground and put it on his shoulder.
"I'll pass on involving myself with that silly platoon play of yours...! Do your best not to die miserably on the battlefield you damn softies, shit...!"
Turning his back towards them, Kyouya left.
Ouka stared at his back, then soon after spat out a sigh.
"...Ootori, is that really okay with you?"
Anxiously, Usagi asked Ouka. Who strongly nodded in response.
"Of course. For me, you are more important than revenge. I have contracted with Vlad for the sake of my comrades and not for revenge."
However, she added while placing her hand on her chin.
"...making Kirigaya our ally might be difficult."
"You're saying strange things. Why would you try to make an ally out of that guy, it seems like there's a reason for that."
When Ikaruga said that, Ouka folded her arms in front of her chest.
"I also think so. I don't want a man with such a violent personality as our ally. Nevertheless, I can understand the feeling of wanting to save Yoshimizu. I absolutely can't forgive him for trying to kill Kiseki... but the one to decide his punishment is Kusanagi."
Seeing Ouka act calmly, Ikaruga smiled wryly.
"By the way Ootori, what do you think Kusanagi would do about him?"
Asked that, Ouka went "Hmm." while looking up at the sky.
"Probably... beat the crap out of him until he's two thirds of the way from dying?"
"...two thirds, ain't that being practically dead."
As Ikaruga retorted, Ouka laughed cheerfully.
"But surely, he wouldn't kill him. That's how Kusanagi is. Soft-hearted, pretending to be tough, thinks of his comrades more than anyone else and a huge fool who places himself on the second place. If he killed Kirigaya, Yoshimizu would suffer... saying things like that he would forgive Kirigaya."
Nostalgically looking up at the sky, Ouka laughed.
They haven't been separated for that long yet, but the thoughts of Takeru felt really nostalgic to her. It must be the same for everyone else, Ouka thought.
Without him, everyone was feeling lonely.
For the members he is a comrade, captain and a benefactor. And for me he is...

After she thought up to that point, she felt pain her chest.
That pain, was loneliness.
Ouka realized that she was more lonely than she thought and faintly blushed.
Ikaruga laughed in a slightly mean manner.
"...so the one making the best expression of a maiden in love, was in fact Ootori."
"?! W-what are you saying all of a sudden?!"
When Ouka got up while raising a weird voice, Usagi squinted and looked towards her.
"...that's the face of an enemy."
"Saionji too?! F-for the most part unlike you I don't feel anything for Kusanagii."
" "Yes yes." "
"□□□□!! What's up with you twoo!"
The two looked at Ouka with amazed expressions.
Late night has come upon the battlefield. On this day, trembling because of fear, fatigue and cold, just the tent of Small Fry Platoon acted noisily as if they were on a school trip and gave the Spriggans an increasingly bad impression.

After moving away from the 35th platoon's tent, Kyouya walked down an alley in the dim Grey City alone.
While facing down, he was mumbling to himself.
"I know that... even if you don't tell me that, I know that best myself."
What Ouka told him wouldn't leave his head.
The priority should be saving Yoshimizu. Kyouya knew that for a long time now.
Her body was weak, and there was a limit to how long he could prolong the clone's short life. The clones subjected to rapid growth were much more vulnerable. They were unable to live a normal life even using the modern technology of Inquisition.
Until a method to save her is found, there was no choice but to borrow Nero's power.
"...there's no other way..."
Kyouya made a pained expression and took out a photo from his bosom.
It was a group photo taken together with the members of 15th test platoon.
There was him sitting in the middle like a delinquent and the four of his other members running towards him, with a fatigued expression Kyouya put the assault rifle on his shoulder.
And, making a peace sign while hugging onto his arm was Akira.
In order not to forget his revenge, Kyouya always looked at this photo.
He recalled those fun days, and the day he lost it all. He recalled the nemesis who took everything away. By doing that, he was able to rekindle his hatred.

But, this time it didn't go well. Ouka's words crossed his mind, and while looking at Akira's appearance on the photo, his revenge vanished and only frustration remained. It wasn't time for revenge. He had to find a method to save her until it's too late.
Even if she was a clone——she was still alive.
"——That's no good Captaainn. Unless you take revenge properly, I won't forgive you."
Kyouya looked up promptly.
Ahead in the dark alley stood a shadow wearing a green dress. He wasn't familiar with the clothing, but the shadow's face was.
"...just joooking. Since Master's heart is shaking, I thought of reminding you ♪."
Even though her face was the same as Akira's, the expression wasn't even similar.
She wasn't Yoshimizu Akira, but the Relic Eater 「Nero」.
"...can't you understand when I tell you to stop using that appearance...! What's your intention to imitate someone's childhood friend!"
When he spoke in a violent tone of voice, Nero came up to Kyouya as if dancing.



And she whispered into his ear with a self-important voice.
"——What's your intention, is my line, Master."
"……!!"
"Why do you think of saving a copy instead of having your revenge? Nero has told you right? She's won't cooperate unless you embrace your heart that's full of revenge, has she not?"
Intimidation bled out of Nero's words, making Kyouya downcast his face. Seeing him conflicted, she licked him lightly with her tongue.
"I know already□, no matter how Master acts, you really don't want to kill witches other than target of your revenge. You are too kind, so you won't fight unless Nero fuels you properly right? If I don't do that you won't hate, is that not so?"
"...shut up."
"But, it will be troubling unless you turn this heart of yours into one that seeks revenge indiscriminately you know? Just like Vlad wants blood, I want revenge. Nero doesn't want a Master who can't make it stand up unless he's doped, okay?"
"...shut up...!"
"Even more so if you want to prolong the copy's life. If Master's desire for revenge disappears, so Nero's healing ability... okay? KYAHAHAHAHAHA!"
"Stop... using Akira's voice!"
Instead of blocking his ears, he swung the light machine gun at Nero. However, the machine gun cut through the air, and thrown into an empty space. Nero's appearance was no longer there.
□"If you understand that, then shape up, Master□. For sake of your beloved copy too□."□
"...khh....!"
□"Even so, I really really love Master? But it can't be helped, that's how Nero was made. Make sure to remember that ♪."□
"Fuck off! You shitty gun!"
When he shouted, Nero's laughter finally disappeared from his head.
Kyouya picked up the photograph that fell down to the ground while his shoulders went up and down wildly, and after looking at each member's face he immediately put it into his bosom pocket.
Then, he faced down bitterly and started walking with hands in his pockets. In his appearance there were no remnants of the time when he walked proudly together with his comrades.
His back was bent, and his figure walking alone through a dark alley looked incredibly lonely.

Chapter 3 - Laugh Maker

Around the same time Ouka and the others finished their meal.
The Fantasy CultValhalla, the Pureblood Party set up a camp in a subway station and has occupied the central part of the Grey City. The Valhalla's borderline invasion had an advantage only at the beginning. Although suppression of the Grey City was easy for them since it was originally a lawless area out of Inquisition's reach, it didn't go so well after passing the Border. Inquisition sortied rapidly, it was as if they appeared from under the ground. Inquisition had a numeric advantage. Moreover, Inquisition had more training in urban battles.
The amount of troops Valhalla had has been gradually reduced and only half was remained.
In the subway camp, there was a crowd of Pureblood Party members lending shoulders to one another.
Currently, they were short on supplies. There was no relief goods coming from any of the transfer device. There were rumours that something has happened to Elizabeth in the inside world who has been sending the Pureblood Party outside.
A single woman silently walked among the depressed soldiers.
She was young. Her cream-coloured hair stood up on their ends, and a bitter expression floated on her face as she was worried about the wounded soldiers.
Among the Pureblood Party members who were clad in red robes, she was someone who gave off a kind impression.
"...Mimulus-sama..."
"It's Mimulus-sama...!"
The soldiers who called the woman 'Mimulus" discarded the blankets they were covered with and stood up.
Mimulus drew closer to the wounded soldiers and healed their wounds one after another.
Although it was a simple healing magic, her unique arrangement of operative procedure made its effect strong. Tears appeared in the soldiers' eyes after just being touched by her warm hand.
"It's definitely a malfunction in the transfer device. After the supplies come you will receive proper treatment. Make do with this for now."
"I...I'm sorry... to bother Mimulus-sama like this... I'm ashamed of myself."
When the young soldier wiped his tears, Mimulus smiled gently.
"You did well with the small amount of goods and forces. We, Ancient Property HoldersAncient Wizards should be the ones apologizing... but we're struggling to prepare Magical Dragoons and we can't participate in combat properly."
As Mimulus said so, the soldier lowered his head many times reverently while shedding tears.
Gently patting his head, Mimulus stood up.

And, once again she called with a stretched-out voice to the worn-out soldiers.
"The weapons have been prepared! We will launch a full-out attack on the enemy in a few days! Everyone, have a little more patience...! If the next attack is successful we'll be able to completely take over Grey City... and then, the empties will understand we are a real threat!"
The soldiers raised voices of admiration and hope appeared on their faces.
Then Mimulus placed a hand on her hip and spoke to everyone who was frozen in their spots.
"Elizabeth-sama promised to send an even larger number of troops from the European shelter. After the battle for Grey City is settled, you all should be able to go home. The day of our victory is close!"
Cheers have resounded from the surroundings and the soldiers have rose up.
Mimulus started walking among the cheers.
"Mimulus-sama... can I speak with you."
And, one of the sub-officers have moved closer to her, then whispered.
"What is it?"
"I thought of consulting something with you, I have a report to make."
Looking at the complexion of sub-officer, Mimulus' expression turned slightly steep.
"Tell me then."
"Yes, as you might know, the young soldiers in particular have accumulated fatigue in their bodies and minds. Among them, there ones with PTSD."
"...it can't be helped. No one in here has any war experience, killing empties is not something one can be used to... let's meet with those people and speak with them directly."
No... that's not it... Actually..."
When she heard the story from the sub-officer, Mimulus' expression turned even more steep.

In the subway's staff room, a painful strike has resounded.
Mimulus was taken by three soldiers to the station's staff room and opened its door with abandon.
"What are you doing...!"
When Mimulus yelled in a spine-chilling voice, the soldiers raised their faces.
The station's staff room was filled with blood.
It could be see at a glance that four elites were beating up a young soldier.
Mimulus moved closer to the man who grasped the boy's collar and swung his fist.
"M-Mimulus-sama... what is it?"
"You bastard...! What are you doing!"
"Please calm dow... we are only working out this deserter."
The elite released his hand from the boy, strongly upset.

"Because of the cowards like them fear is spreading around. Normally, he should have been executed, right...?"
"What are you doing cutting down our forces! Killing soldiers who are scared?! Don't joke around!"
"H-however, Pureblood Party members are not allowed to run away! These guys left their allies and ran away you know?! Their blood is no longer pure, it has clouded over!"
As the man desperately explained, Mimulus directed a gaze of anger and despise towards him.
"Who cares about that. Pureblood or whatever, get rid of stereotypes like that."
"...n-no way."
"On the battlefield everyone is together. The flowing blood mixes and you can't tell the purity. Do not you understand that if you waste a single member, there will be one less to fight?"
As Mimulus moved away from the elite, the cowering soldiers fell to their knees.
"Mim...lass...sama... forgive us..."
"You don't have to speak up. I'll heal your wounds right now. And after that, I want you to fight together with us once again."
When the healing magic has started to work on the soldier, his lips trembled and his expression turned into a mess.
"...I-I don't... want to fight... any more...."

When the soldier spat out softly, the elites behind raised an angry voices.
Mimulus stopped the elite, and smiled to the soldier.
"Me neither. Anyone in here thinks that the faster this ends the better."
"...uu...uuu..."
"But in order to survive and go return, your power is necessary. That's why, try telling me what happened to you."
After Mimulus admonished him gently, the soldiers who escaped started talking one after another.
For most, the clouding pupils of the killed enemies wouldn't leave their heads, and even as they slept they heard gunshots, they couldn't forget the moment when the allies surrounding them have been wiped out... and such, it was a typical after-battle trauma.
While listening to one after another, Mimulus has finished healing them.
The soldiers' trembling and their bad complexion has gradually subsided after hearing her words.
Even the elites were struck with her words, and have listened in silence.
The soldiers have crowded around Mimulus and bowed to her with tears in their eyes.
"I'm so pathetic...! I will no longer hesitate! For Mimulus-sama I will go to the frontline and anywhere else!"
"Me too, I have opened my eyes...!! No matter what happens I will no longer run away!"
A dozen of soldiers has closed on and lowered their heads to Mimulus.
Mimulus nodded strongly and placed a hand on her hip.
"I'm happy for you feelings, but the wounds of heart aren't healed that easily. You all should rest here. Currently we're in a stalemate, and there is no large-scale operation."
In response to her benevolent words, the soldiers shed more and more tears.
She faced towards them with a smile on her face and said.
"Harbouring fear is normal. It's not something to be ashamed of. That's why, at the very least when you are with your comrades, you should laugh. No matter how hopeless the situation is, as long as you smile——"
Mimulus said 「Smile」, it was then.
"Hi-hiii...uu...hiaaaaaaaaaaAAAaAaaAAAA!!!"
The man who was sitting on the edge of the room stood up and tried to distance himself from Mimulus.
He put fingers on his head and started tumbling all around the room..
In response to Mimulus' surprise, one of the soldiers made an expression full of pity.
"That guy is probably done for already. He's been completely broken..."
"What happened?"
"That's... his troop seemed to have been backed up by Laugh Maker."
Hearing 'Laugh Maker' Mimulus frowned. The tumbling man's body was hitting the desks and chairs all around, curled up the man bit his own arm.

"L-l-l-laugh...she said a-an-and we...b-both enemies and allies...e-everyone was told to laugh...e-everyone laughed...laughing crying vomiting, w-we killed each other... crying and laughing, l-la-lau-ha...eha-ehaehahahahahahaha."
Seeing the man laugh, Mimulus was speechless.
"Ehahaahaha noo ahahahaha I don't want to... I don't want to laug... eha, hahahahahahaha."
Unable to look at the man who laughed like a doll, she looked away.
"...were you able to find Laugh Maker's whereabouts?"
Mimulus asked the sub-officer who brought her to the station's staff room.
"She is the only one not allowed to participate in the plan and act alone. No one has actually seen what she really looks like. Other than the fact that she has Eliza-sama's backing, we were told nothing about how she fights."
"As soon as you find her whereabouts, report to me. Why did Eliza-sama allow a fellow like that accompany us..."
Looking as if she was to chew on her nails any moment, Mimulus left the staff room and got onto a trackline running straight.
"You guys, please go back to the camp. Do your best to keep the story about Laugh Maker secret from others."
" "As you say." "
As the two soldiers and sub-officer saluted, Mimulus smiled gently.
"Sorry to make it so hard for you. If you find anything, report it to me immediately. I might not be of much use though."
Leaving that behind her, Mimulus got on the trackline. The soldiers remaining behind saw her off.
After seeing her leave, the expression of one of the soldiers has finally broke.
"That's someone who'd you call a saint... it might be impudent, but I'm glad that Mimulus-sama has taken over after our previous captain."
"Right... gentle, warm, cool and above all a beauty...I wonder how old is she. She looks even younger than me."
Seeing the enamoured attitude of the two, the sub-officer who was seeing off Mimulus cleared his throat.
The two soldiers hurriedly stood upright.
"Are you two idiots lusting for your superior...?"
" "N-not at all, never!" "
"Unlike you carefree bastards, Mimulus-sama's heart is in distress... in the battle earlier, she has lost the troop she was responsible for. We are supposed to support that person, and yet you come and..."
As he said so, the sub-officers expression was unlike that of other Pureblood Party members, a mild one.
While starting at Mimulus who was leaving, the sub-officer quietly closed his eyes.

I thought that this battle is pointless... but maybe we might be able to survive. Among many of those who are eager to take control of Pureblood Party, she alone is sane. She's a respectable person.
Even among the Pureblood Party not everyone was like Elizabeth and wanted to weed out all mixed breed and empties. Certainly, because of karma born from the Witch Hunt War there's many who hate empties, but among them there are those who believe that 「The pure-blooded noble ones must protect the weak, only then the world will be corrected」.
Although there's only a few of them, there are those who are questioning this war. But because of their bloodline they had no other choice but to join the West Side.
The sub-officer was one of them.
Even if that person suffers defeat, she might fight the best way to protect her comrades.
Embracing a pale hope, the sub-officer took the soldiers and went back to the camp.
In meanwhile, the screams of the soldier who has encountered the Laugh Maker continued to resound throughout the subway.

□□□

One week later, Ouka and the others from the Small Fry Platoon have steadily supported the KnightsSpriggans.
"Ootori! At 3 o'clock! A Sniper is aiming from the clock tower!"
Usagi yelled into the radio while running. The clock tower she indicated was a blind spot, and normally one absolutely wouldn't have seen it, but what she said was accurate.
「"Roger that!"」
Ouka turned her body around and shoot Vlad's stake into the clock tower. Even if it didn't hit the sniper, through the rapid fire of physical-attack specialized Wallachia, Ouka destroyed the clock tower itself.
The tiles from the roof and debris from the clock tower itself has rained upon the enemy. Although they didn't die since they used protective magic, it was impossible for them to return to combat.
「"Nice, Usagi."」
While listening to Ikaruga's praise, Usagi pushed up her transparent goggles with a finger and spat out a sigh that welled inside her.
"My field of vision increased three times... it seems quite intoxicating.."
「"It can't be helped, it takes time to get used to it. I'm used to it myself since I acted as the operator in an online FPS game before."」
"G-game you say..."
「"The most recent games are amazing you know? Don't look down on them."」

While her face turned pale as she felt ill, around her there were three spheres floating while letting out a buzzing sound. The spheres circled around Usagi time after time like fairies.
Their appearance was that of mechanical eyeball-like life forms flying in the sky. Truly, creepy.
It was an UAV created by Ikaruga. Although it had no combat functions, thanks to decreasing its strength and making it compact it was hard to spot by the enemy, and it operated by being connected directly to Ikaruga's brain, moving in accordance to her thoughts. Ikaruga did an inhuman feat of operating three sentry bots at the same time.
"I made them by referencing to Nikaido's Fool's FireWill o' Wisp... fufu, cute aren't they."
Buzzing, the sentry bots started to mess around with Usagi.
Mainly, they started to poking into her breasts.
"Stop this at once! What's with these sexual harassing robots, shoo shooo!"
"Ahn, they're very frail so don't hit them with all your strength. Since they're quite sensitive... don't hurt me?"
"Eh... your senses are also connected?!"
"There's no way I'd do that, obviously it's a joke."
"Whuattt?!"
Usagi's voice as she was being teased resounded in the wireless.
"You two! We're in combat, be serious!"
Ouka's angry voice echoed through the intercom, making Usagi concentrate on the battle in a hurry.

While in the middle of the combat in the air, Ouka spat out a sigh at Usagi and Ikaruga who were in high spirits acting like usual. Although it was a good thing that they have familiarized themselves with the battlefield, being over-familiar was also not a good thing. Seeing their funny exchanges in the platoon room recently made her start secretly laughing at them.
In any case, it was the truth that this kind of atmosphere was the best to exert the platoon's strength.
By covering the Spriggans while not endangering themselves, they were able to ensure themselves a certain degree of safety. They didn't move away from each other too far, Ouka was a vanguard, Usagi a rearguard and Ikaruga took care of reconnaissance making the formation work well. They managed to work things out somehow, the three of them.
Although Inquisition was supposed to mount a total attack in order to annihilate the enemy, by then the amount of enemies should decrease. Although she was anxious because of Kyoyua who was monitoring them, like this they were able to properly participate in the battles and he wouldn't have anything to report to the Chairman.
...we might be able to survive this fight. I can see hope.
However, that hope was immediately shaken.
A message came to all the troops.

"Enemy mechanical weapon confirmed——it's an HeroEinherjar…! I repeat, at Point D3 an Einherjar has appeared!"
She could hear Usagi and Ikaruga who were having a comedic dialogue catch their breath loudly, Ouka herself who was ensuring air superiority squinted while looking at a grouping of ruined buildings.
This silence is unpleasant, why aren't there any gunshots resounding? She thought, and at that time.
The barely standing buildings collapsed with a roar.
Ouka's face paled. The place building has collapsed was near Usagi's location.
"Vlad!"
"There's a wave of strange magic… it's Einherjar. Judging by the shape, it's different from the ones that have appeared during the convoy operation. It would be adequate to call him King Arthur-class."
Ouka released magic from her cloak and hurried to where Usagi was.

When the buildings on the street she was defending collapsed, Usagi, who was covering the Spriggans was dumbfounded.
They died again. Their lives were lost in an instant.
The Spriggans who were right in her field of vision were now buried under the buildings.
Starting with Usagi's feet, suddenly a fear and remorse have erupted.
That's when from the place her allies were supposed to be annihilated in, a voice has come.
"Shit, what's happening dammit… hey, you alive?! Can you move?!"
"…no can do… my legs are crushed…"
"Same here, my arms are done for…"
She confirmed the appearance of three surviving Spriggans dragging their injured bodies out of the rubble.
One of them who was intact lent a shoulder to the one who had injured feet.
clang… a heavy sound of footsteps reached her ears.
In the front, moving on top of the debris a gigantic figure has appeared. It's inorganic jet-black armour was grainy like tombstone. On the armour's stone-like surface there was a red pattern which was the evidence of a magical erosion.
The HeroEinherjar——the enemy's new weapon called 'Magical Dragoon'.
It had no ego, it was a remnant of a hero whose name once resounded loudly in this world.
——UUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
After getting on top of the rubble, Einherjar roared.
There was none of the former glory and heroism in its appearance, it only embodied anger and hatred.
It wasn't a simple roar, the wave of sound emitted by Einherjar assaulted stroke fear into everyone in this location.
"…hiii…"

Usagi's body cringed in fear. The three Spriggans also lost the will to fight and gave up. The Einherjar's mechanical eyes shined red, something reminiscent of blood vessels appeared on its muscles and it went to capture the three Spriggans.
"N...need to...run..."
She stepped back while saying that in fear.
Unexpectedly, the words she spoke brought her back.
I want to proudly fulfil my revenge against my family. I want to become respectable. I won't let anyone call me a bastard child. Wasn't I supposed to proudly confront the Saionjis?
At this rate, not just my family——I won't be able to face even Takeru.
"Haa....ghh!"
Usagi clenched her teeth, stopped her feet that carried her away, then stepped forward.
Holding the anti-materiel rifle she started to run towards the Einherjar.
"W-wait Usagi?! What are you thinking——"
She shook off Ikaruga who tried to stop her and squeezed the trigger. Even as she was being blown away by the gun barrel, Usagi forcibly adjusted her weapon and aimed.
Another shot. And at the same time as she fired the third shot, Usagi slid towards where the three Spriggans were.
And after expanding the bi-pot on the debris, she fixed the barrel and fired again.
Seeing a small girl come to their rescue, the three Spriggans made a dazed expressions.
"Y-you..."
"Hurry up, take your comrades and run! I shall take care of this!"
Unable to say anything after seeing a girl come and start shooting from a rifle, the Spriggan left while shouldering his comrade who lost legs.
"Sorry... I owe you one!"
While the Spriggans turned their backs to her with just that, Usagi checked on the damage enemy has taken.
There was not a single scratch on the armour of the Einherjar who stood on top of the rubble.
Even the impact of landing its body has received didn't hurt it, and everything was nullified.
"Nh, it didn't work at all...!"
"If I only had a day more, I'd be able to complete a new weapon, even so, it has quite abnormal defence doesn't it. The guns from supplies are even able to penetrate the armour of armoured vehicles."
Seeing the video from the sentry bot that buzzed beside her, Ikaruga analysed it.
Usagi determined that any more attacks would be pointless and tried to withdraw at once.

And with the exact same timing, the enemy's railgun was directed towards her.
I'm scared, it's a pinch, running away is pointless, even if she thought so it couldn't be helped. She did something stupid so she had to act accordingly.
Usagi kicked off the ground with all her strength and moved from the spot.
It's all right. Help will surely come.
I need to take as much distance as possible, if so, then surely——
"【Count's Fang】!!!"
——Surely, her reliable comrades will rush to her help.

Over the Einherjar's head. So as to penetrate its brains, a huge crimson stake pierced it and burst.
The surrounding rubble was blown away by impact, and Usagi who was running away was almost blown away by the wind.
Ouka who shot the 【Count's Fang】! has landed on the ground a small distance away from the Einherjar.
"I made it in time! I was right to stay nearby after all...!"
【"It's not time to act relieved. Look."】
Just as Vlad said——the enemy was intact.
Despite taking on such destructive force, its body wasn't even shaken.
"It shouldn't have that much magical defence..."
【"No, it's closer to curse than magic... it's characteristics are similar to that of Kusanagi Kiseki."】
There were countless Einherjars with immortality characteristic, but there weren't many who had healing capability or absolute defence to such degree.
If it's not defensive magic, Vlad's specialized stake 【Tepes】 won't work.
There's no such thing as absolute defence... there has to be some kind of weakness.
Einherjars are said to have been invincible once, but they *are already dead.*
Just like it was in King Arthur's case, without a doubt there's a gap to exploit in this enemy's immortality.
——First, reveal its identity!
Ouka expanded piles on the elbows of both her arms and attacked the Einherjar she was confronting.
By ejecting magic from her back and legs, she slipped above the ground hovering and entered the Einherjar's bosom.
For another blow, she has struck the enemy's abdomen with fangs.
Although a strong impact and sound has spread to the surroundings as the aftermath, the armour didn't have a single scratch, let alone a recession.
Ouka continued to rapidly fire the fangs, as if using martial arts she released the stakes continuously, trying to ascertain if there is a weak point in its body.
The enemy's movement wasn't all that fast. After all, even a Magical Dragoon was still a machine.

Ouka's speed was overwhelmingly higher——
"———!!"
When she clearly felt a killing intent and sunk down, a few centimetres above Ouka the sharp blade slipped through. The sunset-coloured hair was divided into two and danced in the air.
Immediately after, the abandoned building in far distance was cut in half and collapsed.
"...ha?"
As expected, a dry laughter leaked from Ouka's mouth. It was a slash that seemed to ignore distance.
From the place Ouka stood to the building that had collapsed, was approximately 100 metres.
"Be cautious! This guy's skill is certainly high, and its weapon's range is wider than can be seen."
Moreover, there's that sharpness. It cut the building as if it was made from tofu. If she eats that, it won't end well.
"It has a form of a railgun, but it mostly functions as a sword. It should have higher performance than that of the one you fought with before. It means it can both cut and shoot just as well."
Ikaruga said such a thing with a light tone of voice.
"Gh, despite having that reach it can shoot too, what kind of joke is this!"
Once again she realized just how big a threat Einherjar was.
The enemy's slashes and shooting began, Ouka decided to attack and avoid at the same time.
She was wrong to think the enemy's movement was slow. Despite having a mechanical body it attacked Ouka with considerable speed. Moreover, the enemy was intact despite taking her attacks and wouldn't receive any impact.
However, Ouka calmly analysed her opponent's movements and characteristics.
"Shooting is just a mere show. Magical power concentrates on one point, and it doesn't have the range nor destructive power of Excalibur. The slashes reach and sharpness is its strongest characteristic."
And this absolute defence...
Ouka organized information in her head and looked for a matching Einherjar.
Her sense of smell improved, and she examined the scent of magical power emitted from the Einherjar.
It's faint, but there's the smell of blood.
"It's not a human's. This is——a dragon."
After hearing Vlad's analysis, Ouka finally saw through the enemy.
Sharpness. Absolute defence. The scent of a dragon. There was only one Einherjar appropriate.
"Siegfried...!"

The weapon was an S-class Magical Heritage 「Balmung」, there was no mistake.
There is no record that would say it exerts slashes of that reach, but if the enemy is Siegfried——defeating this Einherjar is easy.
"Saionji, can you hear me?"
「"Yes, I have seen everything. Your instructions."」
She could hear a voice asking for orders.
At the same time as Ouka released fangs at the enemy, she spoke briefly.
"——Aim at its back."
「"Roger."」
The moment Usagi's calm voice could be heard, behind the enemy light flashed off the muzzle hiding in the shade of debris.
The fired bullets crushed the air and approached the enemy from behind.
Probably perceiving Usagi's killing intent, Einherjar inverted just its upper body. The body from the waist up acted independently and blocked Usagi's bullets.
Its reaction time when it protected its back was abnormal. That was a proof that its back was the Einherjar's weak point.
The Einherjar Siegfried had subjugated the wicked dragon Fafnir and obtained immortality by bathing in its blood. However, the dragon blood hadn't reached his back, and the legend said that he fell after his back was pierced.
It protected its back. Being able to confirm was great.
The Einherjar changed its target to Usagi, and at the same time as it tried to cut her apart as an obstacle, Ouka expanded crimson magical circle and stood firm aiming for Einherjar's back.
"——HAAaaa...!!"
Ouka improved the reflexes and movement speed by accelerating blood flow inside of her body. Because it burdened the heart a great deal it was nowhere close to Takeru's Magic-Sweeping SwordSoumatou, but it was good enough for just a moment.
Left foot in front, right foot backwards. She fixed her aim and swung her arm along with half of her body.
The shooting mechanism attached to her both arms dispersed for a moment and was rebuilt only on her right arm.
A huge pile bunker emerged at her right arm.
Magical power focused and generated one huge pile on her elbow.
And the next moment, Ouka ejected a stake with 「Night Blood」 magical property from the shooting mechanism.
The pile directly hit the Einherjar's back.
The roughly 50 metre long pile pierced the Einherjar's body all at once.
Ouka rose up above it as it struggled with the pile that had penetrated it.
"「Reverse CrucifixionNosferatu」!"
The moment Ouka spoke the magic name, a number of stakes has transferred and jumped out of Einherjar's body.

It was raised up heaven-high and its body has exploded, blown up not leaving a trace.
Ouka stood among the falling remnants of Einherjar and released the Witch Hunter form by swinging her arms sideways.
"...khh."
Unable to bear it she fell on her knees and shook her head to clear the dizziness.
"Splendid... however, after completing the contract just converting your own blood into magical power will be hard on you. Fortunately, this is a battlefield, it's overflowing with blood is it not?"
As Ouka was exhausted, Vlad recommended something very nasty. She shook her head in response.
"I refuse... my pride won't allow that."
"....."
Seeing Ouka's adamant attitude, Vlad fell silent.
Vlad who usually spat out things like "stubborn" or "what a defiant attitude" today was awfully well-behaved. Was he still feeling bad after being done in by Mistilteinn? As Ouka worried about Vlad quite a bit, Usagi ran up to Ouka from behind and lent her a shoulder.
"...sorry, I'm just being helped by Saionji the entire time."
"What are you saying. I had no idea whatsoever as to how defeat the Einherjar."
Laughing weakly, Ouka left her body weight to Usagi.
They saw a large Spriggan forces come from a distance. Among them, there were the Spriggans who were saved by Usagi. It must have been the company's entire force.
Usagi described what happened to them and conveyed the fact that they defeated the Einherjar, which resulted in cheers rising up. Ouka climbed up in the first aid vehicle and looked at the members who praised Usagi.
We should be accepted with this...
While thinking so, Ouka quietly closed her eyes.

Three days after the subjugation of Siegfried.
The position of Small Fry Platoon in the company was certainly heading in a good direction. By subjugating the Einherjar alone, they proved that it wasn't just preferential treatment by Inquisition's Chairman.
"Usagi-chan, you're still small, you should eat more."
The food distribution clerk handed a full bowl of a soup that didn't seem too tasty.
"I cannot eat this much of something tasteless like this!"
Usagi threw a fit in front of the the distribution point, resulting with the Spriggans around laughing.
"As expected of a nice young lady. Her speech sure is refined."

"Usagi-chan doesn't fit in the battlefield, but is her shooting skill amazing because she eats good stuff? What do you need to eat to handle such a monster gun?"
"It won't do unless you eat. It's nutrition, not a luxury."
As the bunch behind her in the distribution line made fun of her, Usagi snorted and went around the kitchenette to the back.
Then she slowly grasped an apron from the distribution point.
"Even if there's nutrition, if it's not delicious strength will not appear. Very well. I'll show you what I can cook with the ingredients that are in here!"
Laughter and cheers have erupted around Usagi. Good grief! She intimidated the surroundings and has proceeded to cooking motivated.
Ouka smiled thinly watching Usagi from the distance.
Continuing, she glanced at the maintenance team's tent.
Ikaruga standing in front of a mountain of firearms spoke with the BlacksmithsRegins about her demonic gun remodelling.
"——This PDW is defective. Because the magazine is made sloppily, a bullet feed failure is likely to occur. It comes in handy because it can shoot specially processed bullets, although the penetrating power is greater than the older ones, you can't use it unless you use both hands."
While waving a gun in one hand by the work desk, Ikaruga explained the shortcomings of it.
The Regins chimed in to Ikaruga with a meek look.
"It's because this is the first time we're in real combat. It was adopted without sufficient testing. They should discard stupid pride and obediently outsource it from Alchemist... what is the development department doing."
"It's impossible to resolve the poor bullet feed, it would require a full magazine redesign. We've had 200 of them introduced this time. The bullet processing is amazing, but I guess it's useless after all. The recoil is small and the power is high. Design is sexy too."
As the two Regins said so, Ikaruga raised her index finger.
"The replacement of guns at the Border has been performed just recently, there should be large quantities of the old version. As long as they have those it'll somehow work out."
"Does that mean, we should use the old version?"
"The old version's barrel's is too soft, and not durable enough to fire the specially processed bullets. The old bullets cannot cope with the enemy's latest protection. That's why, we'll order the old magazines only from the checkpoints. The only part that cannot be adapted to the new processed bullets is the gun's main body, I confirmed that it can be done with the magazine. Also, the old magazine itself can be attached to the new gun's model after a part is shaved off."
"S-seriously...? Isn't such improvisation dangerous?"
"Even from my perspective the processed bullets are innovative, wasting them would be a shame. Here you go, the old magazine I've gotten. Try reloading and shooting with the new model."

The Regin took the old magazine and after attaching it to a new PDW performed a shooting trial.
The magazine was able to allow all the bullets to fire without problems.
"...it shoots normally. If anything, it's even better."
"Just get the old models sent and shave them off, that should make them usable right? Also, cocking level is fine as long as you can hook on it with a finger, it would be good to shave off a third of it. When it's too long it's clunky and loud when you shoot."
"Umm, Ikaruga-chan, what are you really...? You're a student and yet you know the defects of the newly adopted PDW as well as the method to solve them, why is that?"
"It's a trade secret."
Ikaruga contributed to solving the weapon problems within the company.
For the company that was juggling the insufficient supplies and weapons around, Ikaruga's ideas were quite beneficial.
Ouka sat on top of kerosene cans beside the tent, drank the warm coffee from aluminium cup and warmed her hands that were numb with cold.
"...it seems like you saved my subordinates."
When she was taking rest, the company captain has come up to Ouka.
She tried to stand up and salute, but she was stopped by company's commander.
"I don't mind if you concentrate on resting. I just want to say my thanks."
"I wasn't the one who saved them. It was Saionji Usagi who's over there."
"...is that so, pass her my thanks. However, without you we wouldn't be able to fight off the Einherjar. Thank you for saving us."
As the company commander said his thanks, Ouka made a an awkward expression.
"I just used a Relic Eater... also, it's because of my comrades help I could exhibit its power."
Without any humility in particular, Ouka said the truth.
"You are the one chosen by the Relic Eater, and you use its power correctly. I think it's all right to boast of it."
The commander silently stared at Ouka's face.
"Your Relic Eater... Vlad, wasn't it."
"You know of it?"
"...yeah. In the past, I've been taken care of by it before."
In the past... in other words, its previous contractor was the commander's acquaintance? The company commander spat out a sigh and quietly closed his eyes.
"If possible, I didn't want children like you to participate in combat. Having to rely on children is proof that we are worthless..."
He muttered that a bit apologetic.
The reason he had instructed the 35th Test Platoon to the front and to act as a hit&run troop was probably because he didn't want to involve a platoon full of children in a bloody battle.

Most likely, he was sceptical of the idea of test platoons itself existing. The commander closed his eyes and spat a deep breath.
"However, the circumstances don't allow me to say that any more... in the future battles, I want you to participate officially."
Ouka stood up and saluted.
"The CovertBanshee troop has reported discovering enemy's base. Apparently they made a subway their headquarters. Tomorrow, we have scheduled an attack."
"Underground... that's tricky."
"Tomorrow morning, during the time enemy's watch changes the elite troops will invade the underground, place C4's on the pillars and withdraw."
"You want to crush them by blasting the subway?"
She tensed her face hearing the strategy content. The Grey City's underground was made before war and was very brittle. It would collapse with ease if the pillars were to be bombed.
However, this strategy was extremely dangerous and inhuman.
"...it can't be helped. There is information of dangerous Ancient Property HoldersAncient Wizards and a warehouse with Magical Dragoons being there... it's not time to choose the means."
Hearing about dangerous Ancient Wizards, Ouka has recalled the existence of Laugh Maker.
Her blood forcefully started boiling and she tried to remain calm somehow.
"The briefing will happen tonight at 10. Rest early today."
While saluting to the back of the leaving commander, Ouka clenched her fist. The possibility she might meet the Laugh Maker during the tomorrow's assault clouded her heart.
She pushed down those emotions of restlessness and delight.
Imagining the faces of Usagi and Ikaruga, as well as Takeru's and Mari's, then spat out a sigh.
".....it's all right."
Muttering to herself, Ouka looked up at the sky while sipping coffee from the cup and sat down again.
And unexpectedly,
"...my previous contractor often looked up at the sky and muttered 'It's all right' in order to endure. Although he was a weak human being like thou art, his skill in shooting was certainly great."
Vlad's voice resounded in her head. Normally, as a Magical Heritage he acted elegantly and did not speak without permission, mysteriously right now the mood was completely different.
Although his voice was heavy, there was a charm in it that soothed her mind.
Listening to him calmly like this, for some reason nostalgic feelings had awoken in her.
In the first place, Ouka hasn't understood the existences called Magical Heritage. Based on the voice Vlad was a male, then Takeru's Lapis and

Kyouya's Nero had female personalities. Although she heard that Kurogane Hayato's Caligula had a female personality, she couldn't tell since it never spoke.
To begin with, she didn't understand the principles under which personalities of a Magical Heritage work.
Not harbouring disgust towards Vlad like she used to, she asked him casually.
"...Vlad, tell me about yourself."
"Hoh, what kind of turn of events is this?"
"I'm just trying to waste some time. Play along."
"...thou want to use me as a tranquillizer for your spirit huh. Very well, what do you want to know?"
His perspective on her mental state made her feel unpleasant, but she didn't bother getting angry.
"Let's see... I'm curious about your previous contractor."
As Ouka said that, she could hear Vlad's sigh in her head.
"...about him, huh."
"Is there a problem?"
"No... I don't mind. I cannot tell thee the classified information though."
Slightly reluctant, Vlad quietly consented on its master's request.
"He was... let's see. Inflexible, bad with human interaction, poor talker, acted before talking and susceptible to being misunderstood by others."
Although it was probably about the previous contractor, Ouka couldn't shake off the feeling it was about her.
"...and yet he had firm beliefs. And swayed by those beliefs of his he acted like a huge suicidal idiot. To speak frankly, that man was very similar to you."
"I'm feeling malice. There's a lot of malice towards me in what you're saying. What's wrong about being inflexible or a poor talker, and you aren't fit to be an Inquisitor without a firm belief."
"Thou should know that his belief wasn't that of revenge. Unlike thee, the former contractor has known at least that much."
She was unable to refute to Vlad's words.
What's this. Is it his revenge for making it hard for him every day?
"Hmph... in other words, that's the man he was. What is Inquisition. What is magic. What are enemies. He was a man who continued to distress himself over thoughts like that."
"...he was a splendid person wasn't he."
"And therefore, he was unsuited to be part of the organization."
Realizing Vlad's tone of voice changed, Ouka fell silent.
"He was the Zeroth Extermination Riot Police's, EXE's previous captain."
"?! You, you were EXE captain's Relic Eater?!"
"What's with thy surprise. Other guns and Relic Eaters are like babies compared to me."

What is this guy saying despite having a bad fuel efficiency and being hard to handle.
But Ouka didn't dare to say that, and closed her eyes in response to Vlad's self-praise.
"Red Glare", that was his nickname among his comrades. As with thy Crimson PrincessCalamity nickname, it had strong disgraceful implications."
"...Red GlareAbhorrent Red Light, huh."
Ouka imagined his appearance, a figure of a man with two huge handguns standing with his back towards her in middle of the flames, it was strangely easy to imagine. However, it was strange that the story of someone as famous among the Inquisition hasn't reached her ears.
"He had a strong discomfort against magic, but after a certain incident as the turning point he has revised his recognition of it and started having doubts about the current Inquisition. Thou know of Red Butterfly's Insect Cage dost thou not."
"? Yeah, of course."
It was an organisation that was trafficking humans with phantom instrument. Since witches were forbidden to leave offspring, they produced the scarce witch children and sold them expensively.
It was an organization destroyed by EXE a few years ago.
"He infiltrated Insect Cage's organization in order to destroy it and met a single witch in there. Although that witch has given birth to the cage's children, there was no magic power dwelling inside them and didn't work as commodity. She was destined to be killed."
"....."
"He... promised to save that witch no matter what. However, he was ordered by the Inquisition Destroy Insect Cage, eliminate all the products."
"...no way, was he ordered to kill all the witches that were used?"
"Indeed. The products... in particular the children born from witches were subjected to brainwashing education. It has been judged that it will be troublesome afterwards unless they are killed. He rebelled against that order and chose to save them."
Ouka paid tribute to Vlad's previous contractor.
Not just because he opposed the orders, but because he chose to save them.
"However, it was already too late and when he rushed there, Insect Cage members were already disposing off all the goods in order to destroy the evidence. The witch he wanted to save was already dead."
"....."
"He devastated the organization all alone. He was also... forced to kill several of the children products. Of course, since Insect Cage was huge, he was able only to destroy a single branch but... if there was one salvation for him, it was that the child of the witch he wanted to save had survived."

The fight between 「Red Butterfly's Insect Cage」and Inquisition continued for a long time. It spanned over 20 years, and finally reached its conclusion during Kurogane Hayato's era.
Ouka had participated in this conflict as well, and knew of the outrageous conduct Insect Cage has been doing.
「"It was since then. He tried weighting down Inquisition's feet from the inside..."」
The Inquisition sometimes made very unconvincing decisions. Like back during the Einherjar incident or during mock battle tournament. It didn't care about sacrifices and was readily making use of magic.
Surely, there was darkness inside of Inquisition.
「"He wanted to do many things, but as he continued to defy orders from above he was eventually isolated. The higher-ups felt uneasy and forced him to resign when he started dabbling in the darkness of Inquisition."」
"...what happened after that?"
「"He died. Immediately after he stopped being Inquisitor, he was killed by someone. Probably it hath been the remnants of Insect Cage... it was a matter of course for them to hold a grudge against him."」
Vlad's voice as he said that was incredibly flat, and it was impossible to determine if there was any sadness in there.
「"It was regrettable, but I can assure thou that he himself didn't regret it in the least. After all, that person was the one I hath chosen as my contractor."」
If he was fired from the position of an Inquisitor, the contract must have been released.
She suspected that Vlad felt some emotions towards his original contractor that has gone independent. It's probably true that Magical Heritages have hearts too, Ouka thought.
「"Master of mine, Ouka."」
Unexpectedly, he called Ouka's name.
「"The criteria I use for choosing my contractors——is their nobility. What I demand is noble blood. Whether virtuous or evil is not the problem. It's being able to sacrifice oneself for their belief, and carry it through... That is the nobility I request, although imperfect, he hath that intention. Can thou do that yourself?"」
"....."
「"Can thou make an oath not to be misled by the tenacity of revenge, and carry through with thy belief? Is the conviction thee pay in exchange for magic genuine?"」
"....."
「"Thy 「It's all right」... can I believe in it?"」
Being asked that, Ouka stood up while facing down.
"Is the daughter of that witch who survived still alive?"
「"...yeah, she's alive. I don't know whether she's happy or not, but she probably has grown up healthy."」

"I see... then it wasn't for naught. That person's wish, must have been fulfilled."
Ouka looked up at the sky and closed her lips tightly.
On the cloudless sky shone the lonely full moon.
"I think that while the form might be different, the essence is the same. Questioning Inquisition, and fighting all alone... I respect that person."
"....."

"Vlad."

She overlapped her hand with the full moon and clenched her fist as if to grasp it.
"I'm all right."

She overlapped her hand with the full moon and clenched her fist as if to grasp it.
"I'm all right."
With a smile full of confidence, Ouka told Vlad.
"Because of his half-heartedness the lives were lost, he must have surely regretted it. That regret, that conviction… that will of crimson, I shall inherit it all."
□"....."□
"That's why, just like you did in your previous contractor… I want you to believe in me."
In response to Ouka's request, Vlad fell silent. Possibly hesitating, or maybe because of Ouka's deep emotions he could not decide.
In the end, Vlad responded to his master's wish.
□"With my pride on the line… I shall believe in your nobility, my Master."□
Hearing his answer, Ouka nodded content and smiled lightly.
Although she wouldn't have even thought of it in the past, after being bound by contract it was a fact that Vlad and her became one in soul and body.
Rather than deny it, it was something important to know everything, Ouka learned that from Takeru and Mari.
Even if he was a product of magic, Vlad was the partner she entrusted her life to… it was then, Ouka accepted Vlad's existence for the first time.

□□□

Snuggling up to Ouka's soul, Vlad admonished himself.
There were no lies in the words he said to Ouka. It was true that he believed in her nobility.
There were no lies in there.
However, Vlad hasn't necessarily confided everything to her.
Forgive me, my Master. In the end I am merely the king's puppet. It is impossible for me to confide all the truth to thee.
As Ouka walked with no hesitation, Vlad overlapped the previous contractor's figure with hers.
This is fate. Of all people there art, for thou to inherit his will…
While watching his young master, Vlad smiled wryly.
And as not to have to betray this girl, he prayed to no one in particular.

Chapter 4 - Vengeful Demon

Fantasy Cult\sValhalla's second magical company's vice captain, Mimulus Wallenstein has come to the command post with a sorrowful expression.
Although she said that aid will come to relieve the soldiers, it was all lies.
Although they were given HeroesEinherjars by the regimental headquarters, they were all defeated by enemy's EXE members in the first sortie.
They haven't been able to contact the inside world yet, Mimulus' squadron status was that of being completely isolated in the subway.
The chain of command in the regiment headquarters was also out of shape and there were signs that hinted defeat in this battle.
"...excuse me."
While spitting a sigh, Mimulus opened the company commander room's door.
After she opened the door, she found the man who led the company sitting in the back under the lamp's light. Probably writing a letter, he wrote something with old-fashioned brush and ink.
"Mimulus, how was the situation?"
The man who could be called 'old', asked her.
"...you know even without asking don't you. The soldiers' exhaustion has long surpassed the limit. It would be correct to say it's hopeless."
As she spoke while sighing, the old man stroked his trimmed beard and continued to write a letter.
"In other words, they're useless as a military force?"
"Yes. We need to retreat as soon as possible, give them treatment and allow to rest. They continued to suppress the several thousand Inquisition's soldiers enclosing on us, we should show them appreciation accordingly. Is the communication with Eliza-sama still disrupted? Unless we get a supply of goods, we cannot..."
"The situation has changed. There is a conflict on the inside, it seems like Eliza-sama has died."
Even while hearing of Elizabeth's death, Mimulus was unfazed.
If anything, she made a relieved expression.
"Don't expect any aid from the Chairman that's appointed on her place."
"...then, what shall we do?"
"We need to activate the barrier earlier than planned. We need to destroy as many enemies as possible within the range, and build our territory on the outside. In order to prepare for the next coming, we need to defend the Grey City."
Mimulus narrowed her eyes and placed her hand on her mouth, thinking.
The original plan was to conquer the Border called Grey City, thwart the enemy invasion and stretch out a super-strong protection barrier as strong as the one used in the shelters, constructing a witch territory in the outside world for the invasion purposes.

The resistance of Inquisition was beyond their expectations, and they were fast to take their positions too.
While the Pureblood Party was preparing the operative procedure for the barrier's completion, their fortifications were almost overtaken.
"The scout troop has reported the enemy's next target to be our company. Before long the enemy will collapse and bury it... and the higher-ups have decided its abandonment."
"The subway? Can't we move our troops...? We don't have enough personnel to carry everyone."
"No... I'm saying that the bunch above decided to abandon the company itself."
When she understood the meaning of old man's words, Mimulus unconsciously yelled.
"They want to abandon all of them?!"
"Leave it. While the enemy's forces are concentrated in here, all Einherjars as well as Mechanical Dragon will be activated and will raze enemy's camp."
"You want us to use subordinates as decoys...! Leave them, and get away to the headquarters just the two of us?! I won't acknowledge such decision!"
"It's the consensus of West Side. You can't defy it."
"!! Then you can just run away alone...! I will remain in the camp! I'd rather fight together with my comrades and die...!"
With a rough tone of voice Mimulus flared up at the old man. He slowly turned on his chair and put the reading glasses on the desk. He had deep wrinkles under his eyes which looked like a tired crystal. From the condition of his earthen-coloured skin on his cheek, one could see at a glance that he was suffering from a disease.
The old man stared at Mimulus sadly.
Like a father taking pity on his child.
"Instructed by the higher-ups I have been entrusted with you for many long years.. a time like this will come eventually, I thought so with a chagrin."
Leaning deeply on the backrest, the old man looked up at the ceiling.
Unable to understand the meaning of what he suddenly said, Mimulus frowned.
"...what are you talking about?'
"It's about the *current you*. You have grown up without being distorted, turning noble... as a righteous pureblood I have raised you to grow beautiful..."
Able to understand less and less, she suspected him of having some different motives.
The relationship between the old man and Mimulus was long. He picked up Mimulus as an orphan and raised her to become a full-fledged witch. There was never any conflict between him and her despite the fact she wasn't all that committed to purebloods, he wasn't a man who would give vile instructions.

"Thanks to you I have become this kind of person...! I grew up watching your back! That's why, please... don't betray my ideal!"
As Mimulus desperately tried to persuade him, the old man was unable to bear it any longer and covered his face.
"Despise me. Despise the bunch from Insect Cage who destroyed your heart and turned you into a monster, as well as the West Side who only thought of using you... and me, who didn't defy their orders and obeyed them..."
"What happened commander...! What are you saying for a while now?!"
"In the end, everything I have done was for naught... I tried to make you forget and let you live a life of a normal human and acted like a hypocrite..."
The old man slowly opened the desk's drawer and took out a handgun from inside.
He put the muzzle to his own temple.
"A sorcerer of my degree is unable to restrain you any longer."
Understanding that he was trying to commit suicide, Mimulus shook her head and stretched her hand out in the air.
"No way... please stop... why is it? Is it my fault? Then please tell me the reason! What will happen to us if we lose you?! What should I do?!"
"The higher ups want to release you. They have *released you* several times during this war, but I cannot bear to look at a girl like that. Forgive your weak father, Mimulus... this is the last time you will be used."
His finger strongly pulled the trigger.
"Stop! Father!"
Mimulus immediately ran up to the old man.
The old man's trembling lips spun words.

"Laugh———Laugh Maker."

Hearing the words of power right before the bullet was fired, Mimulus' feet stopped.
The old man's head was blown away along with the gunshot, and he soundly fell off the chair.
Blood splashed onto Mimulus' cheek.
Her facial expressions were frozen, and she didn't wipe the blood either.
"....."
With eyes wide open she watched the old man's corpse. The bullet penetrated the head, and from the sight of brain and blood dirtying the floor she understood that the parent who brought her up has died.
But what Mimulus understood wasn't just that her father has died, but also that *her shackles were off*.
Inside of her head, memories and experiences revived like a muddy stream.
She recalled who was she. She recalled what was she.
Tears appeared in her eyes.
Clear drops ran down her cheeks and eventually mingled with the old man's blood staining the ground.

That was the signal.
She recalled everything. The fact that the current her was a lie. That the corpse in front of her was not that of her father. And the fact that the human being called Mimulus didn't exist right from the beginning.
Made aware that she was living a fiction, recalling everything, Mimulus——
"Ahh... that's... right. I am..."
——Laugh Maker made a violent smile.

□□□

Kurogane Hayato stood on top of a roof's building while looking at the landscape which turned into ruins.
Aside from Hayato in his Witch Hunter form there was another EXE member.
His Relic Eaters were □Caligula□ and □Maximillian□. In the history of EXE, there was no precedent for anyone to be chosen by two Relic Eaters.
Jet black and silvery armour, sinister and sublime have combined symbolizing their respective magic properties of □Tyrant□ and □Revolution□.
Hayato released the Witch Hunt form and while performing a gunspin, he holstered the guns at his waist.
"...no matter how many times I look at it, this mass of destruction takes me aback, captain Kurogane."
Even as he heard voice from behind, Hayato did not look back. Only indifferently responded to the voice.
"Oonogi, I should have given you an order to return at once. Thanks to you I wasted time for no reason."
"You use people strictly and now this huh. I have properly passed the message to Ouka-san."
While pouting, Kanata lined up next to Hayato. Below them there was wreckage of an Einherjar and the corpse of an Ancient Property HolderAncient Wizard, it was clear that the destruction wasn't worth the number defeated. The street of the Grey City that were on the verge of decay have changed drastically.
"Can I be frank and ask something? Just what is Ootori Ouka to you?"
"What will you do if you know."
"It's just my curiosity, after all I'm also part of the organization. Even if she's just adopted, she bears the name of Ootori and cannot be trusted. She might be detrimental to our *dissent.*"
After saying 'dissent', Kanata waited for Hayato's reaction.
While looking at the ruins below him, Hayato quietly spoke.
"I know nothing of the dissent you're speaking about."
"Despite lending you a hand so many times, isn't this comment too much?"

"The only thing I asked you bunch was to help the 35th Test Platoon escape. If you try to win them over, I won't show you mercy."
"I don't know about Hoshijiro-san, but the one I want to win over the most is you though?"
"I have no intention of taking part in a terrorism-like dissent."
As he refused bluntly, Kanata spat out a sigh.
"... why are you so stubborn? Even you are trying to rebel against the Inquisition right now."
"I'll do it in my own way. I have no intention of discarding Witch HunterDullahan."
"Even I don't have any intention of leaving it. But at this rate, your entire life will end as a puppet of Ootori Sougetsu. Because of that man, world might be destroyed you know?"
"....."

"What is the reason that makes you cling to being an Inquisitor? Does it have any relation to Ootori Ouka?"
Kanata peeked into Hayato's face.
He who hasn't shown any reaction until this moment, just looked towards her without moving.
"——Don't play dumb. I'll crush you.Your conveying the message took too long. You probably have investigated Ootori Ouka already, haven't you."
His speech became rough. Even when he delivered guidance with a hard fist to his subordinates for their poor performance, his tone of voice and look in the eyes were flat.
And right now, that Hayato was full of anger. Even the Covert'sBanshee's ace who experienced carnage and hell many times winced in response to his thirst for blood.
If she lied any more than this, he would carry out what he said he would. If this man said he would crush someone, he would actually do it.
"...about Ouka-san's parents, I haven't been able to find any clues no matter what date I looked through, but Hoshijiro-san learned something from a certain person and has an idea."
"....."
"——Red Glare, the man who was once your boss. Although his term as a Dullahan was short he managed to climb up to the position of EXE's temporary captain, and after repeatedly rebelling against Inquisition he was forced to resign. A while after, he was killed by the remnants of 『Red Butterfly's Insect Cage』..."
Unmoving, Hayato stared coldly at Kanata.
She didn't mind it and continued.
"In the Inquisition's database all the records about him were erased and all EXE members supporting him were fired along with him. Afterwards, they suffered a similar fate as he did. That's why there's only a few in the Inquisition who know anything."
"....."
"It was hard to find someone who knows. Even those who knew kept their mouths tightly shut."
Kanata took out documents from her bosom and held them out in front of Hayato's chest.
Hayato didn't take it and just remained silent.
"His real name was Mineshiro Kazuma. Although he had a wife and a daughter, he kept silent about his work. It isn't anything unusual. I'm the same too."
"....."
"After leaving Inquisition he adopted a single child. The baby that was born without magic and survived the attack on the 『Red Butterfly's Insect Cage』..."
She retracted the documents and looked in Hayato's face with a sigh.

"It's been nearly nine years since it was rescued from Insect Cage but... that child was Ouka-san right?"
In response to Kanata's speculation, Hayato silently closed his eyes.
She took it as his affirmation.
"Mineshiro-san has doubted Ootori Sougetsu and was sniffing around. That's why he caught attention of higher-ups... he was fired and killed. Am I wrong?"
Hayato didn't answer. She couldn't read what is he hiding within.
"Probably Mineshiro-san has had a grasp on something decisive. Ootori Sougetsu killed Mineshiro-san to hide it, and the only person who survived was Ouka-san who wasn't connected to him by blood."
"....."
"From here on it's not Hoshijiro-san's but my own selfish guess... did Ootori Sougetsu leave young Ouka-san as to prevent you from betraying him? Was Captain told by Mineshiro-san anything like 'were something to happen I want you to protect my daughters'...?"
In response to Kanata who stared at him seriously, Hayato glared at her coldly.
And he started to leak out a heavy laughter.
"Even if that was the case... what does it have to do with you."
"I-it does. If these are the circumstances, for us dissidents Ouka-san would become a protection target——"
"——Don't underestimate me, Oonogi."
What could be seen in Hayato's wide-opened eyes was not irritation not anger. It was the sense of mission, the belief itself dwelled inside.
"I haven't fallen to a point where I have to be protected by you dissidents, and I don't conform to Ootori Sougetsu in order to protect Mineshiro Kazuma's daughter. I'm not as soft as Red Glare as to suffer because of my own conduct."
"...c-certainly Mineshiro-san wasn't a good talker but still, as a fellow Inquisitor you——"
"It's true that he taught me how to be a Dullahan. I'm grateful to him. It's probably true that Ootori Sougetsu adopted Ouka in order not to have me betray him. In fact, I'm trying to protect her. I cannot defy Ootori Sougetsu because of that. Your guess is correct."
Hayato indifferently spoke of his own circumstances.
"However, me protecting Ootori Ouka is no different from protecting civilians. There is no special fondness in it, it has nothing to do with Mineshiro. As an Inquisitor I just protect those that should be protected and eradicate those who should be eradicated."
Pressured by his strong stare, Kanata gasped.
"As an Inquisitor I cannot allow her to die, that's all. Do you understand, Oonogi?"

"...you merely carry through with your duties as an Inquisitor and following the law... and none of your actions are dictated by emotions... is that what it means?"
"I'm obeying my own laws. I have no intention of supporting illegal dissident organizations like yours. That's the *wrong* thing to do as an Inquisitor."
Cloudless eyes is something that would perfectly describe his, Kanata thought.
Unshakeable conviction. It was as if he was the Inquisitor's ideal sculptured in marble, surely, no matter how many people pushed him he wouldn't ever move. For him numbers didn't exist. For Zeroth Extermination Riot Police's captain, there was only the concept of 「Dullahan」.
He was a living Inquisitor's ideal. He wasn't just, evil, all there was in him was the system called 「Law」. A human functioning only as a system... a broken one.
"....."
She changed her thinking and her goal. It was impossible to draw Hayato in to the dissidents. He didn't allow Ootori Sougetsu's existence nor he tolerated the dissidents. Were she or Hoshijiro Nagaru commit a criminal act, Hayato would deliver legitimate punishment to them as an Inquisitor.
Although she determined that it's not possible to make him an ally, his presence was too dangerous to have as an enemy.
Somehow, she had to maintain their relationship to an extent of cooperation and matching interests.
Even without Relic Eaters, this man was a dangerous existence.
With Hoshijiro-san being chased after by Inquisition, I can't hide for long either. In exchange for helping Ouka-san escape, I should at least request information exchange——
The moment Kanata decided, Hayato has suddenly opened his eyes wide looking at a distant dome-shaped official building. When she started to wonder what happened, ground under her feet started to shake.
"E-earthquake...?"
Certainly, it was shaking. The tremor has gradually increased and before long she has staggered.
"Oonogi, prepare Nobunaga."
"Eh?"
"It's coming. Cover me."
Hayato pulled out Relic Eaters from the holster and jumped down from the building.
"Wait a sec——what's that...!"
As Kanata tried to restrain Hayato, cracks ran through the dome-shaped building. The outer shell of the building which looked akin to a sports arena was filled with cracks and collapsed like an egg.
The moment a chill ran down her spine, a loud screeching roar has reached her. The jarring cry resonated inside her belly and carved humanly instinctual fear into Kanata.

There were three threats that appeared. The appearance of those things that have appeared raising their heads up to the sky were undeniable...
"...Dragons...?! The things from 5th Laboratory were mass-produced...?!"
"Their armour wasn't manufactured from Blue Crystal so their defence is lower, but their stability should be higher."
Hearing Hayato's sober analysis, Kanata's face paled.
The enemy introduced not only HeroesEinherjars, but also Mechanical Dragons.
"Take as much distance as you can and cover me with Nobunaga. Aim at the floating mechanism in their spine, that's their weakness. We'll clean it up just the two of us."
"......!!"
"Answer me. The fact that you're an Inquisitor and my subordinate still hasn't changed."
Kanata clenched her teeth and hesitated for a moment.
The feeling of not wanting to die in this place and wanting to protect the KnightsSpriggans balanced each other out. The mission she was given by the dissidents led by Hoshijiro Nagaru was just solicitation of Kurogane Hayato and helping the 35th Test Platoon to escape. She would abandon those who can be abandoned. Her mission was the priority.
However, if she abandoned her mission as an Inquisitor99 here, Hayato's muzzle might be aimed at her.
Honestly——that was much more scary option.
"I get it, I get it dammitt...!"
Kanata clad herself in lead-coloured Witch Hunter form's armour and took up the sniper rifle Nobunaga.
The enemies were three fake Dragons summoned with pseudo Myth Summoning. Despite the overwhelmingly disadvantageous situation, Kanata pulled Nobunaga's trigger feeling desperate.

10 kilometres from the company's camp, there was the subway which was their target.
Currently, the 35th Test Platoon was entering the subway through an underground passage. By breaking through the grats and barricades, Ouka and the others proceeded through the lightless underground passage. By mounting night vision scope on the gun, Ouka looked into the ticket gate from behind a phone box.
Although there was evidence of human activity, the essential thing, their figures couldn't be seen.
"...clear."
When Ouka reported through radio, the KnightsSpriggans and Usagi together with them came up to her one after another while crouching.
"It's strange... even lookouts are nowhere to be seen."
Usagi stared with anxious expression, Ouka approached the tent that was stretched near the entrance.
The coffee that was stood on top of the magic powered heater was still hot.

As she looked around, she couldn't see any evidence of enemy running away in a hurry.
It looked as if they'd suddenly disappeared.
They were communicated that there's the same situation on other routes other squads took. Enemy hasn't fled, but the possibility that they were either evacuated further down or were hiding was high.
"Ain't this a trap? I think it would be better to abort the plan."
"It's not up to me to decide... but, I can consult this a the very least."
Ikaruga's guess was reasonable. Nothing good would have come from a plan that risks her comrades' lives.
When Ouka tried to contact the commander, someone grasped her shoulder from behind.
"Don't do unnecessary things. After we finish this operation our victory is pretty much determined right? There's no point stopping now."
Kirigaya Kyouya shouldered Nero and glared at Ouka.
Usually Kyouya acted on his own, but for some reason he decided to go together with 35th platoon. Ouka returned a glare at him.
"Majority of our troops take part in this operation. If we're done in here, not only the camp but also the fifth line of defence will be assaulted."
"Ha, if you're worried about comrades then even more the reason to hurry up and finish it. The soft ones are at their mental limit... if we don't decide it here, there's no later for us."
There was some truth in there. With the status quo of having no supplies or reinforcements, the Inquisitors have survived from the beginning until the January's half. Everyone was exhausted because of sleeping in places where they have to be vigilant, and a number of people passed their mental limits. Moreover, the 7th company personnel decreased to 200 people.
Since they came all the way here, it's better if they finish quickly and go back.
".....fine. However, the ones who will be proceeding further is just me and you."
"Ah?"
"What, scared?"
As Ouka provoked him, Kyouya's cheek twitched and a blood vessel surfaced on his temple
"Who the hell are you saying this to... you want me to beat you up...?!"
"Then prove it. I'll take the station's home, you take the walkway."
"Don't order me around, I——"
"If you're scared then it's fine for you to remain here. I'll be fine checking the home and the walkway myself."
"...!!.....damn you!"
Kyouya took away the bag containing C4 explosives from a Spriggan while clicking his tongue and began to walk towards the walkway.
"...don't ya think he's a surprisingly easy-to-use man?"

As Ouka shrugged her shoulders the bunch behind raised their hands, and Usagi spat out a breath to the side. While Ouka too has thought that he's simple, she also thought there's more than that to Kyouya.
He had a violent temperament, but that was why it was easy to set him on the right trajectory.
"I want others to ensure a retreat route through this place. If the two of us communicate that we'll be using a different route, or your own judgement tells you to, you are to run away without hesitation."
As she told that to the Spriggans and Usagi.
"Ootori...!"
Usagi called out to her from behind as if to keep her in place.
Ouka turned around only once.
"It's all right, Saionji. Until Kusanagi comes back, as the temporary captain I won't kick the bucket so easily. I'll definitely come back, don't worry."
As she smiled gently, Usagi blushed and looked sideways.
"...a-as long as you understand... it's fine? Since in a way you're our temporary captain... you dying would be t-troublesome."
"Yeah. I know. There's no way I'll die and leave you behind."
In response to Ouka who said so confidently, Usagi made a small nod, relieved.
Ouka once again turned her back to others, and after passing the ticket gate she went down the stairs.

□□□

The Spriggans and Usagi who were left behind thought that they should at least do what they can, and started to investigate.
They examined the tents one by one and learned one thing. Anything they found were items usable by normal humans. Aluminium cups. Worn-out sleeping bags. Toothbrush with a paste on it. Guitar brought in for entertainment, calendar, harmonica. A worn-out gravure magazine, and a chess that substituted the pieces with empty medicine pills.
A group photo with comrades. Family photo. A letter to a lover.
Everything in there, proved that the ones they were killing are normal humans.
"...I have seen something unpleasant."
When Usagi's mental state turned into one that made her want to cry as she left the tent, she found the station's staff room.
With the possibility of enemy being inside, she clung to the door's side with a PDW set up.
She grabbed the doorknob with one hand, opening the door and immediately aimed the muzzle inside.

".....wha—!!"
After she entered the staff room, the spectacle inside turned her speechless. There were no enemies inside. To be precise, what used to be enemies was there.
Lying next to the desk was a corpse of an old man wearing a military uniform of Pureblood Party.
Usagi went down on one knee and checked the pistol lying beside the corpse.
"He's probably the commander-class but... it was suicide, wasn't it."
Feeling unable to stand it, she examined the room in detail.
Although all the information was disposed off as expected, there was a brush and a pen placed on top of the desk.
It could be seen at a glance that it was a suicide note. She didn't want to touch things left by someone who committed a suicide, but she thought that it might not reach its destination otherwise.
Usagi took the letter in hand. It would be too sad if it was thrown into trash by someone without ever being read. The suicide note was something addressed to his daughter.
"...Mimulus? That's a flower's name."
In the language of flowers, it meant □Show me a smile□.
Honestly, she thought it was a good name. That's why even more, she was unable to understand why would the old man commit suicide leaving her daughter behind. Even if he were to be defeated, he might survive and meet her one day...
Feeling sad, Usagi casually read the letter.

To Mimulus Wallenstein. My beloved daughter.
Although you might never read this letter, thinking of possibility of you surviving as you are, I leave this letter for you.
Mimulus, it's been six years since I have been entrusted with you. You might not remember it, but I have met with you when you seemed to be fourteen years old. Even now I remember my dismay when I was told to keep an adolescent child. You disagree with West Side's on many matters, but I was delighted to see your quarrels with West Side.
Even if we're not related by blood, as your father, your chest full of purity and pride is my own pride. I really think you grew up to be a honest person. I'm really... grateful to you.

Love for his own daughter has been spelled on the suicide note. Even if they were unrelated by blood, he wrote just how much he loved his daughter.
"……?"
However, after Usagi finished reading the first piece, she noticed that there were following letters. There were three crumpled pieces of paper. Usagi took another one and turned it over.

~~It's a lie. It's all deception.~~
~~If it was me from the past, I would have told you everything directly.~~
~~But now, it's impossible for me. I no longer know whether I love you or not.~~
~~Why is it? The way you live should have changed, so why?~~
~~In the end, was everything I have done for naught? Is the Mimulus I have brought up just one big lie? Did you laugh at me in the shade for trying to raise you pure as my own child?~~
~~Laugh, my Mimulus. I loved you. My love for you was equal to that for my own son.~~
~~But... you... I don't know. I no longer know you.~~

The lines were drawn over the text, there were traces of him trying to erase it in a hurry.
Usagi's expression tensed strongly. She couldn't tell what kind of content was it from the pieces that could be read, but it was bleeding insanity.

~~I hate them. The Insect Cage that has hurt you, broke you, and turned you into a murderer.~~
~~I hate the West Side that took my family as hostages and ordered me to release you.~~
~~Oh, how scared am I of you, Mimulus. Your smile is so, so scary I can't help it. I don't want to look at my daughter being so dreadful any more. The smile that blooms on your face makes other feel respect, reverence. Your smile is like that of a saint and makes others immerse in peaceful feelings, they are unable to look away from your face...!~~
~~Why do you laugh?! After having so many things done to you, how can you have such a pure smile on your face?!~~
~~Laugh, Mimulus, what on earth are you?!~~
~~What on nine hells did I raise?!~~

The suicide note was like a scream. There was remorse, love for his daughter and fear. He himself was split inside, his mental state was out of order, he wrote the letter in such state.
The sentences eventually turned into just a list of single words as the blood that has splattered all over it made it almost completely unreadable.

Goods train[redacted] murd[redacted] mo[redacted]ste[redacted] corr[redacted]ed [redacted]mile laughi[redacted] and lau[redacted] [redacted]ile
[redacted] I thou[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] a child ju[redacted] how horrible [redacted] don't [redacted] any more don't [redacted] any more don't [redacted] any more I beg [redacted] don't [redacted]ile in my direct[redacted]n ne[redacted] [redacted] run [redacted] need to [redacted] away I don't [redacted] to [redacted] you [redacted] [redacted] any longer pl[redacted]s[redacted] don't laugh any more I hate [redacted] I hate [redacted] Just now, [redacted] the door a soun[redacted] foots[redacted] comi[redacted] close[redacted] [redacted]'s coming again coming h[redacted]e in this underground station this sound of [redacted] this battlefield
——Standing behind me now.

"W-what's...this?"

Feeling madness coming from the strange wording, Usagi turned over to the last piece.
On the bottom of last page, written with huge twisted characters there was.
A suspicious name, seeing that name, Usagi was horrified.

Laugh Maker is here

A chill, as if someone poured cold water on her has assaulted Usagi.
Dropping the letter on the floor, Usagi stepped back and placed a hand on her mouth.
"...I-I need to... tell Ootori...!"
This place is dangerous. She needs to explain that to Spriggans, then take Ouka and escape from the subway.
The moment Usagi bumped into the door with her back, she jumped outside.
She grasped the doorknob and with a abandon closed the rusty door.
"——Hiiii...!"
In front of her, there was a smile.

Ouka investigated the routes branching off from the station's home one after another.
Unchangingly, none of them seemed to be populated.

"I have sent Sentry Bots to scout the other passages, but there's no one there. For now, there's no biological reactions. Well, there's a tons of places you can hide so I can't be certain."
"There should be a number of people in here... there aren't many territories of Fantasy Cult'sValhalla's left."
"It's bad isn't it... the station is narrow so one bot in each is a limit."
"That helps. No problem."
While carefully checking, she went down the stairs to station's home.
She was under the guise of calm, but her pulse wasn't calm at all.
The rumour of Laugh Maker being here has clouded her mind.
"Usagi might have said so... but you don't feel too uneasy at all, do you?"
As Ikaruga pointed out sharply, Ouka stopped moving for a moment.
"...so you can tell after all. I'm no match for you, Suginami."
"We have the same experiences as you do, so we feel similar about that matter, you don't have to worry. Humans aren't creatures that can live that simply. There's no need to be ashamed of that."
Nothing to be ashamed of. Told so, Ouka stared at the palm of her hand.
The trembling of it could be easily misunderstood as convulsions. Ouka was aware that it didn't come from fear.
She was trembling with excitement. She was delighted by the fact that the target of her revenge might be here.
"...I have a feeling that says, she is here."
"....."
"She is here... thinking that... I...!"
"....."
"I'm feeling like doing something...!"
Ouka realized she was laughing and covered her face with both of her hands.
The joy she was unable to suppress has overflowed through a smile. At the thought of having her vengeance, she couldn't help but be glad.
All the blood vessels in her body were boiling, her blood was simmering.
"Ha-haha... I thought that... I'll be all right. The smile... I've had it the entire time since I came here. Trembling won't stop... are bodies really this honest? Even as I force it down, it overflows..."
"....."
"I didn't think I would turn this strange... or that I was this weak."
She laughed mockingly at herself, and clasped her trembling hands together.
"——It's all right. I'm with you."
As Ikaruga said so, Ouka stopped for a moment.
She listened to the radio with a cramped smile on her face.
"As not to let you do anything dumb, I'll be clamouring at your ear. Don't worry. I won't let you turn into a vengeful demon."
"...Sugi..nami..."

"Despite everything, I have been supporting you in combat for a long time. I could only prepare the weapons and provide you advice through radio but... I know what's going on in your hearts."
Hearing Ikaruga's strong tone of voice, Ouka's expression turned back to normal.
"Even if you drown in revenge, I can understand that. A human's heart is not a machine. There's no one who acts according to perfect logic or a program. That's why other people are there."
In the end, Ikaruga laughed lightly and said mischievously.
"Shall I say it in Kusanagish way? That is why there are comrades for you."
"……!!"
"Myself intends to be the reliable foundation you can depend on."
It was a line that made Ouka imagine Ikaruga on the other side sit crosslegged and with a proud expression.
Ouka spat out a deep breath and faced forward.
That's right. I'm not alone. Comrades are with me. I can rely on them for more than just combat.
That is why they're called 'comrades' aren't they.
"...really, t-thank you. If I seem like I'm going out of control, it would be great if you stopped me."
"Roogeeer."
"I'm... really no good am I. I'm being saved by you guys the whole time."
"That's true. Similar to a certain no-good captain, our temporary captain also needs to be taken care of."
"Sorry. After everything's over, let me treat you to some food."
"Rather than food, after all this trouble I'd rather have your two bulges ——"
"……?"
Ikaruga's joke was suddenly interrupted, making Ouka feel puzzled.
"...Suginami? Hey, what happened?"
"———"
There was no reply. Not even noise has sounded from the radio, not a single thing. Thinking it's a malfunction, she took off the intercom and hit it with her fingers.
The sound of her hitting it lightly has sounded in the darkness.
*...*kuku*...*kukukuku*.*
Noticing a laughter mixed in with the sound, Ouka looked up.
"!! Who is it?!"
She raised her voice towards the darkness.
Her voice echoed as if she was in the mountains and overlapped with the laughter.
**kukukuku*, *kukukukuku*, *kukukukukukuku*.*
It wasn't a single person. There were many of them, there were many voices laughing.

Squinting, she was able to see the source of those voices.
On the track of the station's home, there, was a platoon of soldiers clad in red clothes.
……! There wasn't any presence at all in there before…!
Ouka hurriedly activated Witch Hunter form and stood wary of enemy's movement. Enemy didn't move. Their heads drooped low while they stood upright and they wobbled to left and right.
It was a bizarre sight. It looked like a troop of ghosts.
The enemies held their wands. She was irritated by the situation that didn't make it clear whether she should shoot or not.
"…Master… beware."
Unexpectedly, Vlad has muttered.
"What is it."
"Do not get distraught. Do not forget us. Thy nobility, show it to me."
"……?"
Unable to understand what he said, Ouka frowned. Vlad spat a very deep breath inside of her head.
"……it's her."
At the same time as he spoke shortly, there was movement in the middle of enemy ranks.
The enemy's laughter stopped, leaving only one person laughing. A charming, female voice. There was innocence of a young girl and eeriness that reminded Ouka of snake's tongue.
Ouka could see a shadow coming in her direction while dividing the enemy ranks.
Stepping on the gravel between the tracks, it slowly loomed towards her. Distorted magic power surrounded its body like aura, and the person herself has appeared in front of Ouka.
Bright red uniform simbolozing Pureblood Party. A little bit of blood was mixed in with her strawberry blonde hair. Clouded lifeless grey eyes.
Red lips as if she sucked someone's blood drew a soft arc, making a smile of a saint.
"Good evening. A wonderful night, isn't it."
A gentle and soft voice. It a clear voice unfitting the battlefield.
On the contrary, rustling resounded in Ouka's heart.
"Nn…? That beautiful sunset-coloured hair seems familiar. I know about you."
The giggling woman apparently knew about Ouka.
Ouka too, knew her.
"Certainly, it was during the work I have undertaken five years ago. That's right… I remember now! What am I saying here, there's no way I could forget about you!"
"———"

"You were in the middle of that family which looked so happy. Gentle father and mother, and a little sister that you seemed to get along with. You're the one of them aren't you?"
"———"
"That work, was really enjoyable. It was my last job as a member of Red Butterfly. I remember it even now. It was really nice."
The woman stroked her red lips with her finger, tilted her head and smiled to Ouka.
The only thing reflected in Ouka's eyes was the woman's figure. Vlad's voice and screams in the distance didn't reach her.
Ouka knew her. There was no way her existence engraved in Ouka's memory could be forgotten.
The woman's laughter. Gentle, merry, just like it was back then——

"When you killed your family——you had a wonderful smile."

Once before, this woman said 'Laugh' to Ouka.
With the same smile she had now, same voice whispering into her ear, in front of her——she robbed Ouka of everything.
Laugh Maker. The one who has derailed Ouka's life, her abominable enemy was in front of her.
"——————AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"
Ouka launched from the train station's home and swung her right arm at the woman's smile.
She used maximum output of 【Count's Fang】. She released a blow that boasted of a power which could possibly collapse the entire subway, not minding anything else.
"How impatient."
With a smile still on her face, Laugh Maker stroked her lips.
That moment, the soldiers hanging down have aimed their wands at Ouka in unison and shot huge magic bullets.
Ouka was unable to even think of avoiding it. All of the bullets struck her body and blew her away with an impact similar to that of a cannon.
Her body was blown far, far away and crashed onto the wall.
Enemy's magical bullets weren't something mere soldiers could create with concentration of their magic power. Each of them was comparable to a blow of an HeroEinherjar. The lined-up soldiers have wobbled from left to right and all fainted.
They sacrifices their lives and magic power simultaneously, and momentarily died.
"Thank you for the treat.... you did your best. I definitely won't forget your smiles."

With a benevolent smile, Laugh Maker spoke words of appreciation to the dead soldiers.
All of the ones who died were smiling. There was no anguish in their expression, their eyes were wet with tears of regret, they died with huge smiles on their faces. The remaining soldiers were all smiling. They wailed and laughed at the same time.
——Mimulus-sama...why?
——I don't want to die...I don't want to laugh any more...it hurts.
——We believed in you...
——I beg you... don't kill your comrades...
Even though their voices were tragic and sad, they had big smiles on their faces.
From under the collapsed wall, Ouka directed her sight at the woman.
"——Laugh Makerrr!"
Ouka pierced through the cloud of dust and attacked Laugh Maker again.
"What an amazingly straightforward child. Are you angry after all?"
Laugh Maker stroked her lips again, and the soldiers summoned a magical circle, instead of magical bullets, they have released chains. The chains entangled Ouka's body and constrained her in the air.
"Gg-gghhhhhhhhhh...!"
Bound with chains, Ouka struggled while glaring at Laugh Maker.
She raised a distorted voice like a beast, seeing only her enemy she rampaged.
"Calm down Master! Ouka! You can easily penetrate and break these chains with our power!"
Vlad's voice restraining her didn't reach, Ouka directed her murderous intent towards the Laugh Maker.
"Why did you kill my family?! What did they have to do with you?! Answer me!"
"Consider the circumstance, if you release the fang at maximum output the underground will collapse, and it might involve our comrades as well!"
"My little sister was just five years old...! Five! Such a young child... you... and of all things you made me kill her...! I won't forgive you... I will never forgive yooouuu!!"
Her fangs exposed, she forced her body forward. The chain tangled around her more and more as she moved. Their strength was incredible to the point where even Witch Hunter form's superhuman strength couldn't break through it.
Laugh Maker jumped into the station's home and landed right in front of Ouka.
She leaned forward right in front of Ouka, and stared into her eyes.
It looked like a mad dog and its owner.
"That Relic Eater... I remember it. Have you become... your own fathers, Red Glare's successor? Even if not connected by blood, he was your parent wasn't he."

Hearing Laugh Maker's profound words, Ouka stopped moving for a moment while still in rage.
The woman continued.
"You came to take revenge for Red Glare haven't you?"
"What are you talking about...! What does Red Glare have to do with me?!"
"Oh? Can it be that you don't know? Just now, I've said that I have killed your family, but there was a good reason for that you know?"
With a blank look, Laugh Maker said.
"Your father, Mineshiro Kazuma wasn't a civilian. Called Red Glare once, he used to be the Inquisition's Witch Hunter and captain of the EXE. He has infiltrated my home 「Red Butterfly Insect Cage」 as it was on brink of destruction, and had caught me."
Ouka was speechless as she heard the truth from Laugh Maker's mouth.
She received a shock, learning that her adoptive father was Red Glare.
But what surprised her even more, was the fact that her family was killed for such a reason.
"So you massacred my family to take revenge for that...?! With just that as the reason?!"
"Ahaha. No, that's wrong. I didn't really hate him. If anything, I was grateful to him. He was the hero who saved me. I don't kill anyone out of hatred."
Laugh Maker wrapped Ouka's cheeks with both of her hands and stroked them gently.
Looking at Ouka with benevolent gaze, she spoke the reason Ouka's family died.
"I killed Red Glare because... he was in trouble."
".....wh-at...?"
"He was given orders from Inquisition to devastate Insect Cage, and executed it. Several of the children that were supposed to be the goods were disposed off right? When he confronted me too... it looked difficult for him. I understood that his Inquisitor side and his gentle side were in conflict."
With a tear moistening her cheek, Laugh Maker let out a deep sigh.
"——That's why I saved him. I released him from his suffering. If one dies with a smile on their face, they go to heaven."
Hearing a motive for murder she couldn't understand, Ouka boiled inside.
What she understood, was only the fact that this woman was broken beyond help.
"You are... insane...!"
Ouka glared at her with hatred, in response Laugh Maker made a wondering expression.
"Why make such expression? You should understand as well. After all, you too should have become a Red Butterfly just like I did."
"Don't speak... any more of that crap...! I'll kill you... right now...!
"Ouka, listen properly okay? I'm not lying. Your real mother was the Insect Cage's merchandise like me. Because no magic power dwelled within you

when you were born, you were supposed to be killed, but Red Glare struggled in order to save your mother. He wasn't able to save your mother*because I have killed her*, but you have survived. Surely, he took you in to atone for being unable to save your mother. I'm sure that he caught me instead of killing for the same reason... that's right, to atone."
Laugh Maker spoke the facts unknown to Ouka one after another.
Ouka didn't know if what she said was the truth. However, there were many points that connected with Vlad said. If the witch Red Glare was trying to save was Ouka's mother, she could understand why would he take in Ouka who didn't even know her parents.
——However, so what if that was the case. That truth was no reason for her family to be killed. Her adoptive father, mother, little sister, her real mother, the truth that she killed them all didn't change.
The number of reasons to hate her only increased.
Laugh Maker spoke indifferently of the past, as if it was nothing.
"It's okay... everyone died while laughing happily, right?"
"……!!"
"Your little sister laughed too, right? Even though she was very sad to have her Onee-chan take her life, she did her best and smiled didn't she?"
Ouka's anger burst out, she has pulled out her right arm from the chain all at once and hit Laugh Maker's face with her fist. Laugh Maker easily caught her fist with one hand.
"What amazing strength! But my ancient property is quite something too."
Laugh Maker's magical circle released a dazzling white light.
Ouka recognized the property at a glance.
Ancient Property 「Radiance」. It was a property that specialized in strengthening magic to the limit, and allowed to convert the target's life force into magic power. The magic bullet that hit Ouka before and the chains were released by the soldiers after they have passed their limits.
"Hey... don't be so angry okay? No matter how difficult it is you have to smile. I have been trained in the Insect Cage to do so. You too should have become a Red Butterfly, so you need to follow my example."
Stroking Ouka's cheek who was going wild, she made a sorrowful smile.

"I was one of the Insect Cage's goods. I was hurt until I broke physically and mentally. Probably, I have tasted all the despair and disgrace, pain in this world. It was so hard I felt like dying, but then I noticed that if I laughed the trouble passed."

"I'll kill you...! I'll kill you, Laugh Maker!"
"Oh, you will kill me? Very well, kill me. Death is a salvation for me... but you need to laugh okay? Kill me while laughing won't you? I'll let myself get killed if you laugh."

"Who cares...I'll kill you...!"
"Even now, I'm grateful to the people of Insect Cage. After all, I'm always laughing, and I grant death while laughing to the people around the world. Don't you think it is a joyous thing?"
"I'll kill you...! I'll kill you, Laugh Maker!"
"Oh, you will kill me? Very well, kill me. Death is a salvation for me... but you need to laugh okay? Kill me while laughing won't you? I'll let myself get killed if you laugh."
"Y...ou...crazy...murderer!"
As Ouka lashed out with her eyes dyed bright red, Laugh Maker downcast her eyes sadly.
"...you have decided already that I'm crazy haven't you. The people from Fantasy CultValhalla who took me in after I escaped from Inquisition were the same. They decided I'm abnormal, a monster, and have condemned me to loss of memory. Among them, even a person with shady feeling of love has appeared and tried to re-educate me you know? Why can't they understand I wonder..."
Although she hung her head for a moment, immediately after she looked up with a smile.
"But it's all right! As long as we laugh anything will go well! To get you to know that, I need to grant smiles to more people!"
Laugh Maker's eyes sparkled like that of a little girl as she said so triumphantly.
Then, she created red butterfly wings behind her with magical power and put more strength into both of her hands that were wrapping Ouka's face.
"Now, show me a smile? No matter how harsh the conditions are, you should laugh happily. It's all right, no need to be scared. Just like when you killed your little sister, it's fine to laugh and kill me."
Having a premonition some kind of magic was about to be cast Ouka struggled, but she couldn't muster any strength from her body.
"——Not good... thou canst handle this magic! Thou hast to get away! She has already begun to control thy strength! At this rate she'll deprive thee of control over thy body!"
"Aa...gh..."
"You have the chain's operative procedure in thy head do you not! Penetrate and destroy it with Tepes!"
"...aaAAAAA!"
For the completely-out-of-control Ouka it was impossible to build an operative procedure in her head.
A magical circle rotated under Laugh Maker's feet and the butterfly wings fluttered.
"Now——I will make your smile."
Tears ran down the Laugh Maker's cheek as she activated the magic. There was no longer any way to escape. Just like back when she killed her family,

she would be deprived of the control over her body and smile despite not wanting to.
——And just when Laugh Maker was activating magic.
"Slug Shot!"
A mass of dark green magical power has hit Laugh Maker from the side. Her body bent to the side, and she was blown away. At the same time the chains were broken, Ouka's body has regained freedom.
"Tch, there's not enough power...!"
"I have to suppress the power or this underground will collapse right. Are you really fine with us being crushed along with it?"
"Shut up, be silent you damn gun!"
Kyouya left the ticket gate and went down the stairs, moving closer while holding a shotgun.
Laugh Maker already flew away through the tunnel on her butterfly wings. After suddenly stopping in front of Ouka, Kyouya clicked his tongue with a chagrin.
"Damn...! She got away...!"
"We can't catch up with her. At the moment Master's really pitiful."
"It's your performance that's poor!"
"It's because Master is good for nothing recently that I cannot demonstrate a decent performance. Don't make it as if it's my fault"
"Hmph, despite being an inorganic object you have a habit of making excuses...!"
While severely cursing, Kyouya glared sideways at Ouka who knelt on the floor.
"Ha, that's quite a way to show yourself after making a request to go alone, miss captain."
"....."
"If you crawl on the ground right in front of your revenge, I won't be helping ya."
Kyouya provoked Ouka while looking at her with scorn.
"I'll kill her instead. You can sit there on your knees if you want."
"...shut up."
"Aa?"
"——Shut up, I'll kill you."
As a tremendous killing intent was directed towards him, goosebumps appeared on Kyouya's skin and he narrowed his eyes sharply.
From behind her long bangs, he saw Ouka's eyes harbouring a blue flame inside. Her eyes inside of the crimson-like hair and thirst of blood were remarkably strong, and the blue colour shone.
Looking at the mass of murderous intent her eyes have become, he let out a distorted laughter.
"That's how it should be... ain't that quite a good expression, Ootori Ouka...!"
"...I'll be the one to kill her. She's only mine prey."

"Goin' all out aren't you. Let's have a match to see who can kill her first then, me or you."
As Kyouya poised with Nero, Ouka stood up and activated Witch Hunter form again.
The vengeful demons stood at the entrance to the tunnel.
Both of them kicked off the ground and tried to run after Laugh Maker.
——By chance, Ouka's ears picked up a faint sound.
After a moment of silence, she could hear some kind of noise. After looking at the suspicious source of the sound, she saw the intercom that has fallen to the ground after she was blown away.
As a feeble voice leaked from its speaker, Ouka has——
"...Oo...tori... h-hel...p..."
——Ouka has finally regained sanity.
With a pale expression she picked up the intercom and attached it to her ear.
"——What happened!"
"...a trap...suddenly enemy assaulted us...while laughing... and then... breathing... both enemies and allies were... by a poisonous gas...!"
Speechless, she looked towards the stairs leading to the ticket gate, she saw something like a dark red mist silently come down.
Hearing Usagi cough violently, blood was drained from her body and she paled.
"Such a thing...!"
She finally realized that she forgot herself in revenge and neglected communication with her comrades.
'Tch, she used such a dirty trick... hey, we need to hur——"
Before Kyouya could even finish, Ouka kicked off the ground and started to sprint. The destination she headed to wasn't where Laugh Maker was, but the one her comrades were in.
".....hmph."
Seeing Ouka desperate, even if Kyouya didn't understand what's happening he still followed after her.

"Saionji!"
When she arrived at the entrance, it was already filled with poisonous gas. She found Usagi immediately, she tried to carry two Spriggans who couldn't move.
There were corpses of Pureblood Party all around as well as corpses of many Spriggans. The enemies Laugh Maker manipulated were also hit by the poisonous gas.
"I-I'm sorry... geho... I was wearing the mask but... it was also corrosive..."
Ouka was unable to let out any voice seeing Usagi. Wherever skin could be seen there was something like black bruises. Mask also was corroded and had a hole in it. Fortunately Usagi's mask barely withstood it as it was

specially made by Ikaruga, but masks of the Spriggans have completely collapsed.
"...hurry... you need to get out!"
"The Spriggans... we can't leave them... at least those two..."
Her body was already turning black, but Usagi took care of the two who barely could breathe. When Ouka tried to carry the two's bodies,
"Outta way."
Pushing her away by the shoulder Kyouya moved to the front. He squatted down in front of the Spriggans and Usagi, placed a hand on their foreheads and expanded a dark green magical circle on their foreheads.
"Since Nero's property is Poison, it can generate enough to neutralize other."
The black bruises disappeared from Usagi's and the Spriggans' bodies. After neutralizing the poison, Kyouya carried one of the Spriggans on his shoulder and dragged the other by his collar.
"It's too late for others. Hurry up and carry Saionji. We're escaping."
"Kirigaya... nhh, I owe you."
'Shut up. Dammit, you've completely lost the edge."
She did as Kyouya said as he turned away irritated, Ouka lifted Usagi in both of her hands.
"Ootori... I'm glad...you're safe... I couldn't contact you... and was worried..."
".....I'm really... sorry..."
"...? Why are you crying...?"
While holding Usagi who was mystified, Ouka shed tears.
She knew that she had no right to apologize nor any right to cry, Ouka was overwhelmed by her own weakness.
All the words she spoke to her comrades and Vlad ended up being a lie.
Ouka earnestly blamed herself for being manipulated by her own revenge.

Chapter 5 - Inheritance of Crimson

The Pureblood Party's transfer device was installed in an old military underpass.
Since no relief supplies had arrived for a long time, it wasn't populated.
Because all the soldiers had participated in the last battle for the territory construction, there were only five soldiers deployed on the lookout near the entrance.
A short soldier wearing a helmet yawned and rotated the wand as if it was a pen. Other soldiers were seriously guarding.
There was a reaction from the transfer device at the very same moment as the guard finished yawning.
Just when they thought it was hit with lightning, a magical circle appeared in the centre of transfer device and shone brilliantly.
The dazzle turned into a sphere of light and gradually fixed itself in the centre of the apparatus.
Something emerged from the centre of the sphere, as if something new had been born from the light, something that seemed like cells built up bodies from the feet and going up. The cells combined like puzzle pieces, and after forming a human, a single boy jumped out from the sphere.
The boy pierced the ground with the sword he has pulled out.
Sweat-drops hung from his bangs and he moaned because of his rapidly beating heart.
He shook his head disoriented, vigilant of the surroundings. After confirming there was no one there, the boy stared at his palm.
He had all his limbs. His heart was beating. After confirming his safety, the boy looked ahead of him.
"I'm back."
——In the inner world he was given a method to save Kiseki by Magical Academy and has returned.
In order to do what he ought to do, Takeru came back.
He encountered a world of magic he was unable to even imagine, met numerous people and reunited with his teacher.
On the other side he would be able to spend time peacefully. He didn't have to involve himself with battles and lived normally, forgetting everything.
He didn't do so because he left too many things in the outside world. There was a promise. A person to save. And comrades to fight alongside with.
Abandoning all that and surrendering himself to peace was something Takeru was unable to do.
Kusanagi Takeru has returned.
In order to save everything that was dear to him.
Using the sword he pierced into the ground like a cane, Takeru rose up.
"I'm coming to save you... Kiseki!"

However, when he got on his knees,
" " UWAaaa. " "
The moment he heard a voice from overhead, something suddenly squashed Takeru's body, he was unable to even let out a voice.
"Owww...! Hey Kana-chan... it's not how you said it'll be! Why were we thrown out in the air!"
"Tss, don't tell that to Kana! It's the device's bad for having deviated coordinates, it's not Kana's faultt."
Mari and Kanaria who fell from above quarrelled while on top of Takeru's body.
On the back of his head there was Mari's butt and Kanaria's chest was pressed against his back.
Honestly, it wasn't a situation where he could immerse in desires. Because of Mari he hit his nose strongly, and because of Kanaria the symbol of his manhood was crushed.
"...could you... get off please?"
As Takeru said so, feeling like a frog ran over by a car, Mari noticed that she pushed down his head with her butt and jumped away while holding down her skirt. Kanaria too sluggishly got up and fixed her dishevelled hair.
He stood up checking if his nose and groin are all right.
"Takeru's a pervert!"
"Isn't that unreasonable no matter how you look at it..."
Takeru complained and rotated looking around.
"If I'm right, there's supposed to be a time lag with a transfer?"
"We felt an instant pass, but half a day should have actually elapsed. It's strangely quiet... I wonder if fight is already over."
Mari said, thinking that the silence in the surroundings is strange, and Kanaria put a hand on the sword on her back.
"Since it's the Pureblood Party's device, this place should be enemy territory. Be cautious."
"But it's pitch black? In fact, since the supplies are the cornerstone for war, there should be strict security. It's weird that there's no one in here."
Mari too pushed the brim of her hat with a finger and started searching for the enemy.
Meanwhile, Takeru alone found a presence.
"No, there are. The five of you there, come out. If you surrender I won't take your lives."
Takeru unsheathed the sword and called out to the soldiers at the entrance.
He was prepared for some resistance, but the five raised both of their hands and started walking towards them.
And as he felt enemy's obedience is suspicious,
"...wow, that, is that Magic Academy's school uniform? Hee□ it's blue."
Hearing the carefree voice of the soldier in front, he thought something was wrong. The five were wearing Pureblood Party's red military uniform, but he couldn't see their faces hidden behind the helmets.

"I get that you're not resisting. But I'll have to bind you. Don't think bad of me."
"No□that would be troublesome so please don't. Of course, it will be troublesome for you, is that fine? Kusanagi-kun."
Being called by his name by a soldier he didn't know, Takeru was startled. The soldier's voice was familiar. He squinted at the small soldier in front. The carefree tone as if playing dumb and small stature, he could also faintly see the red hair stick out from inside the helmet.
"——It's been a while, Kusanagi-kun and Mari-chan. I've been waiting."
It was AntiMagic Academy's student council president, Hoshijiro Nagaru.
"P-president? Why are you in a place like this..."
While Takeru stood surprised, Nagaru threw away the helmet and started to run to him with wide open arms.
"Welcome back dear□□□□□! Do you want a meal□? A bath□? Or □may □be! Kyahhn☆"
When she jumped into his chest with a smile, Takeru grabbed her head with the palm of his hand. Nagaru said "hobuu", still held by Takeru, she dangled in mid-air.
"...you, what'cha doin'."
"Heyheyy, my neck, it'll break you know? My legs can't reach the floor. They're dangly."
"Why are you here, Student Council President."
Releasing his hand from her head, Takeru asked very calmly. They just barely came back to the outside world, and his head was unable to keep up with the situation.
Nagaru made a displeased look while rubbing her neck.
"Come on, you're so meannn. I have been waiting for you for a looong time you know?"
"Waiting you say... this place, isn't it managed by Pureblood Party? Rather, why are you wearing their uniforms."
He asked a frank question. There's no way she had changed job and became a Pureblood Party member has she, but since she invited Takeru into the dissidents, that wasn't impossible.
It isn't. He didn't think it is.
"...it isn't, is it?"
"Ahh□ actually I thought of fighting Inquisition as part of Pureblood Party□"
As Nagaru laughed embarrassedly, Takeru pulled out his sword and put it against her neck.
"Yes, it was a joke. I'm sorry for spouting crap."
"...act seriously."
"Men who can't get jokes aren't popularr... in fact, I have received a report that you'll be returning. That's why I sneaked in among the Pureblood Party, and waited for you here."
"? Why does student council president know such a thing..."
Nagaru went "fufun" and puffed her chest proudly.

"Your Master, Orochi-kun has been cooperating with us a little bit. Well, no matter what we tried he wouldn't become our ally completely, but he went out of his way to tell us that he's giving you back."
"Master and Student Council President were acquaintances...?"
In that case, that man let Takeru do as he pleased despite knowing everything.
Without doubt, he also knew that the one he promised was Nagaru. He must have judged that it is all right to entrust his disciple to her.
"I've heard more or less what happened on the other side."
"...is that so."
"Yup. You did well to come back... you did your best to come back and keep your promise right? Thanks."
Nagaru conveyed her thanks to him straightforwardly and smiled radiantly.
He thought that she's a scheming person and even if it's a mistake, he thought her smile was cute.
Then he felt danger, and was pushed from the side by Mari. Then Mari glared at Nagaru.
"Even though I'm listening to you, not everything falls into its place... sneaking in among the Pureblood Party should be impossible normally. You, did you do something behind the scenes?"
Nagaru smiled wryly.
"Ahh□ in fact, I'm wanted by the Inquisition. After it was exposed to be the one to help Kusanagi-kun and Ouka-chan escape, I couldn't afford let myself be caught, and Pureblood Party that's hostile to the Inquisition was the best place to hide"
"That's not really an answer..."
Although Mari stared at Nagaru intensely, soon after she looked towards the four behind her she was curious about for a while already. Who are they? When she tried to relay that to Nagaru with her gaze, the four people in the back removed their helmets and revealed their faces.
"We are Fantasy Cult'sValhalla's Pureblood Party members, Europe Shelter West Side's eight squad's soldiers."
The man who looked like the captain said so with a serious look.
Since they named themselves members of Pureblood Party, there was no way not to be vigilant.
Takeru and Kanaria clenched their swords.
"Ahh wait waait! They are my collaborators!"
"There's no way the Pureblood Party would collaborate with you...! They assaulted us on the other side you know?!"
As Mari yelled, Nagaru went in front of Takeru and others who let out a menacing feel, flapping her hands.
"Not all of those people have the same ideas. I've been in touch with them for a while now, but now they have gotten along with the Pureblood Party's operation and came over."

Nagaru seemed to have obtained their cooperation, and had them shelter her from the Inquisition.
Getting into the position of transfer device's guard was difficult, she said exaggeratedly while raising both of her hands.
Both Takeru and Mari were very doubtful of it. Kanaria was more vigilant than the two and it wouldn't be weird if she unsheathed the sword any time.
Realizing that the three were vigilant, the Captain corrected his posture and stood in front of Takeru.
"I think it's natural not to believe it. After all, both of us were enemies until now."
"...yeah. You have reasons to support the Inquisition's dissidents. Does that mean that people from the inside world are changing their thinking to that of East Side?"
As Takeru mentioned that sharply, the Captain quietly closed his eyes.
"Don't misunderstand. It's not like we're quitting the Pureblood Party. We can't agree with East Side's thinking. Purebloods are the ones who should control the inside world and make sure the society flourishes."
"Then you're the same as Pureblood Party on the inside, you hate us and people of mixed blood..."
"It's not like we hate them. It's just that their history isn't as refined as that of ours. The history accumulates in the blood and is handed down. Magic can be said to be the same. It's obvious that purebloods are better than mixed ones. It is natural that the talented ones move the world."
It was annoying how he looked down at them, no pride could be felt from him either.
He just stated the facts, that's what his tone of voice suggested.
A shadow appeared on the Captain's face and he continued.
"...however, West Side has stepped on the wrong road. Our, Pureblood Party's principle is not to eliminate humans who don't have magic power or mixed breeds, hurt them or drive them out. That's an evil philosophy that should be cast away. Protecting empties and leading the way as purebloods is their pride, the current West Side has forgotten that. This invasion is just a show of power... it has to be stopped as soon as possible."
"...so that's why you help dissidents?"
"The ones to stop this war shouldn't be the inside, but the outside people. We are cooperating with Hoshijiro-dono because our interests are aligned, but with our pride as purebloods on the line we promise not to interfere with you."
The Captain said so while staring straight at Takeru.
Although Takeru was unable to agree with a concept completely alien to him, it wasn't distorted enough for him to deny it completely. Although he didn't know this man's upbringing, he felt that he was similar to himself.
The soldiers in the back also seemed to have strongly solidarized with that. They did their best to change the current situation.

"Yess, so for now we are cooperating with each other□, handshake handshake□"
Forcibly making Takeru and the Captain have a handshake, then laughed in a silly way. Her attitude and tone were carefree, but for having a connection with Orochi and the Pureblood Party she was extremely abnormal.
"For now let's leave the difficult talk and talk about the future for other time. First, we need to stop this invasion. We can't let Pureblood Party to build a territory in the outside world, that would make Inquisition an excuse to retaliate with full force. If it comes to that, we won't be able to avoid sacrifices among the general public. We need to prevent the war from spreading."
It was already too late for invasion from the other side, but they have to forget the sorrow after losing them.
Saying so, Nagaru continued.
"There's one more thing. For Kusanagi-kun this should be the priority."
"……?"
"Listen calmly to what I'm going to say now."
Having a bad premonition, Takeru's face strongly cramped up.
Nagaru told him what he wanted to know the most.
"Your comrades are on this battlefield. Everyone——Ouka-chan is in danger. I'll explain everything to you, hurry and go save them."
The bad news have surpassed Takeru's imagination.

□□□

Traces of a tragedy have spread out in front of her, it was more than enough to deprieve Ouka and the others of hope.
They escaped from the subway, and after they came back to the company's camp Ouka was astounded.
Smoke was rising from all over the place, and the smell of roasted meat has spread.
In the middle of debris of the armoury, there was a mountain of corpses stacked up. Flames were rising from the mountain of corpses and blood was boiling in it, dyeing the ground black.
Seeing their comrades burn in eerie aquamarine-coloured flame, strength left the knees of the two KnightsSpriggans.
"——Suginami!!!"
Usagi shouted Ikaruga's name and ran to the 35th platoon's tent.
Ouka could only see her off, stunned.
"Tch... they sent all the HeroEinherjar machines... Nero, can you analyse the magic property from that flame?"
Kyouya said so while looking around the camp.

□"You can tell just by looking. This magic power's enormous destructive effectiveness comes from the □Dragon□ property."□
"So a Mechanical Dragon did it... I don't like it."
While spitting curses Kyouya looked sideways at Ouka.
Ouka drooped down with an extremely pale face.
".....it's my fault."
She could only blame herself.
When the communication with Ikaruga was interrupted, she should have went back assuming an emergency. Because there was a high chance of a trap, she should have called for ceasing the operation. It could have had a different result...
Forgetting herself in revenge and getting distracted seeing the enemy right in front of her has led to the worst result.
While calling her comrades the most important thing, she made the worst choice.
This devastation was something she had invited in.
"...it's not really your fault. Don't burden yourself with responsibility for no reason. You saw that right? The enemy killed their own allies with a poisonous gas. Those guys were used as bait, and enemy was aiming for the camp all along."
□"That's right. We were led to a trap, on top of Master being a fool you too joined him in being foolish, that's all□. You'll profit from that as long as you're alive□."□
"Shut up you shitty gun."
Even the words of Kyouya who showed his concern didn't reach Ouka.
".....back then...if I only came back..."
"Judging by the devastation, the enemy aimed mainly for this place which is in the middle of the Grey City. Even if me and you were here, it's doubtful we'd be able to repel them."
With a lower tone of voice Kyouya made a guess.
But Ouka didn't stop to blame herself.
"...what a moody woman... if they killed ours, we kill theirs, that's all. I intend to do so."
□"That's right. Mast□eer, it's revenge?! Let's clear up the company's chagrin! Let's beat them all up□!"□
Ignoring Nero, Kyouya stared at Ouka who was drooping down.
"....."
□"Can it be Master, that the time you lost your comrades has overlapped for you with her now? Noo noo nooo we don't need that! Nero doesn't need that!"□
"You're annoying... shut up."
Kyouya couldn't find any words he could say to Ouka. Just as Nero said, he overlapped himself from back then with her.
Eventually, Ouka started walking towards the platoon's tent with a wobbly gait.

□□□

The Small Fry Platoon's tent was also desolated like everything else.
The luggage was thrown out and burned along with the tent. Ikaruga was nowhere to be seen.
While desperately bearing the urge to cry, Usagi searched for Ikaruga.
"Suginamii! If you're alive then please respondd!"
Not even considering the possibility of enemies being close, Usagi cried out.
There was no answer. The bodies and wreckage burned and the only thing that could be heard was sound of sparks.
"...u...uu..."
She wiped the tears, and with a face covered in soot she scavenged among the rubble.
What she found were only bodies and a firearm distorted by heat.
"...f-fuee..nn..."
The droplets flowing down her cheeks couldn't be stopped. Usagi fell on her knees and cried.
That's when... she heard a faint sound similar to that of an alarm. She thought she misheard for a moment, but she certainly heard that from the 35th platoon's tent wreckage.
"..........?"
Usagi put her hand into the burnt wood and scooped out ash.
She immediately found the source of the sound. It was a large rectangular box covered with anti-magic coating. It was a weapon case Ikaruga had brought. Usagi knew that the contents of the box was a new weapon Ikaruga hurriedly completed overnight.
Opening her eyes widely, she tried to open the box in a hurry.
"Ouchh...!"
Maybe because it was in the flames, but the box was very hot. She retracted her hand with a watery eyes.
When she did,
□"Saionji Usagi's DNA recognition complete——Hello my master."□
The box let out a mechanical voice and suddenly opened.
What vigorously appeared from inside the box was a single sniper rifle. Completely different from the semi-automatic rifle and the anti-materiel rifles Usagi has used until now, it had a futuristic form. It's shape was somehow similar to that of the railguns Einherjars were using.
Other than that there were magazines with bullets inside, and three bullets with transparent tips shining in rainbow-coloured light. Furthermore, there was a single bullet with a same transparent shell, emitting a grey light.
Usagi touched the bullets in silence and grabbed the gun's body.

Suddenly, something like electric current ran through her body.
"——, ——gi, ———Usagi, can you hear me?"
After feeling a slight pain, she could hear Ikaruga's voice echo in her head. She opened her eyes wide in surprise.
"Suginami?! Are you all right?!"
"That's great... you found it properly haven't you. As expected of my beloved Usagi-chan."
"W-where are you hiding? Not just the voice, show yourself as well."
Glad that Ikaruga was alive, Usagi returned to her threatening tone of voice.
"I can't really do that... this voice is made from the electric signal I send to your head through this gun I made. Inside of this gun, there are the Philosopher's StoneNanomachines. Well, you can think of it as of a part of me."
Usagi looked at the gun she was holding and unconsciously was taken aback.
"N-no way... your real body hasn't died has it?!"
"...why would you think that? It's all right, I'm alive. Right now, I was captured by the enemy along with the Spriggans."
"Where...?!"
"Probably, this is the Alchemist's fifth laboratory. The way the walls are made is familiar. How ironic... to be taken here once again."
Because of the feelings she had for her old home, Ikaruga's voice became very low. The fifth laboratory. Once before the 35th platoon had fought there to prevent the restoration of elves.
"We'll come to save you immediately!"
"Of course you'll come, but before that let me explain the situation to you. The enemy intends to destroy as much of the Inquisition in the vicinity and erect a barrier. Probably it's one that's too powerful to be destroyed from outside and can only be taken down by destroying the device from inside. Unless we destroy it before activation, we can't expect any reinforcements from the Inquisition's side."
"Roger that. I shall relay that to Ootori."
As Usagi said so, Ikaruga spat out a small sigh.
"Tell Ootori... that I'm sorry for not being able to fight together with her."
"? You were there fighting together, acting as her support haven't you."
".....I won't tell you since it's embarrassing."
It was unexpected to hear the word 'embarrassing' from Ikaruga's mouth, but Usagi somehow felt like she was being left out.
"Hurry up if possible. It seems like the enemy isn't going to make any use of us, so after questioning is over they'll finish us. I've heard a comrade's screams a moment ago."
The situation was serious, but Usagi has gotten grasp on faint hope and no longer cried. If there's hope, even a faint one, Saionji Usagi becomes strong.
"Please don't worry! We'll definitely come and save you!"

"I'll teach you how to use this gun. Well, if my voice explaining right now is interrupted that means I was either killed or made their plaything, you can think whatever."
"Don't say things that sound like a bad omen!!"
After shouting at Ikaruga in response to her black joke, she was taught how to use the gun.
And then, Usagi learned the gun's performance was outrageous and far beyond her imagination.

□□□

After walking into the 35th platoon's tent, Ouka stumbled on something.
When she raised her body and looked under her feet, she saw a charred corpse of a comrade laying there.
She raised her dirty face and looked around, feeling the stench of death in the hot air.
It was a scene full of death. Feeling like she was blown away to hell while still alive was suffocating.
"...sorry..."
Saying an apology with a trembling voice, Ouka writhed on the ground as if she was in agony.
"...I'm...sorry..."
She didn't think that the fact that someone lost their lives because of her was this painful.
Knowing that she shouldn't have given priority to revenge, she could only hate herself. Ouka earnestly apologized, that's the only thing she could do now.
If she didn't do so, her heart wouldn't hold out.
".....who are you apologizing to?"
When she looked up weakly, she saw Usagi look down on her with an angry expression.
Unable to withstand Usagi's gaze, Ouka turned away.
"It's not your fault that this happened. We still haven't done what we should have. Even if we noticed the trap back then and returned to camp, it was already too late."
"...but, I acted based on my own feelings. When you were suffering... and our comrades were killed... I... lost myself in revenge."
"It can't be helped."
"No such thing... what I have sworn to you turned into a lie. I used my power in a wrong way... I shouldn't have used it for revenge, but for the sake of my comrades...!"
As Ouka continued to blame herself, Usagi's gaze turned cold.

She turned her ears deaf to Ouka's voice, and felt angry at Ouka for brooding over it all alone.
"...temporarily, let*s* say that it's your fault that everything has turned out like this. So... all you're going to do is sit there and blame yourself?〃
Ouka was unable to answer to her question immediately.
Even as Ouka attempted to cheer herself up, her body didn't listen. It was because her object of hate, was herself.
"——Ootori Ouka!"
Suddenly, Usagi grasped Ouka's collar and spoke right into her face.
Despite having tears in her eyes, Usagi stared powerfully at Ouka.
"Even if you're strong in battle, is your heart weaker than mine...? It's not, right? You should be much stronger than me! You withstood the despair that felt like it'll crush your mind, and stood up while clenching your teeth haven't you!"
"...Saionji."
"Surely, you don't have any resistance to failure and regret. So what if you failed once, so what if you regret doing something once. You should be able to stand up time after time again!"
Usagi could say that because she failed countless times.
She was aware that she was a burden to the platoon. She was able to properly do her job nowadays, but before she was a no-good sniper who shot her allies by mistake. Even now she wasn't being praised. When she first came to this battlefield, she couldn't stop trembling seeing death right in front of her.
And yet, Usagi stood up. It didn't end up with her on her knees. With a harsh expression, she scolded Ouka.
"I understand your feelings. Were I alone, I wouldn't have risen again. Kusanagi and Suginami, Nikaido... and you, if not for you being there I would have surely been on my knees. It's all thanks to you that I'm here now."
Usagi assaulted Ouka with feelings of gratitude.
She released the clothes from her grasp and gently wrapped Ouka's cheeks with both of her hands.
"Ootori... please, stop cowering there all alone. There's no Kusanagi nor Nikaido in here... but I am. I don't think I'm too reliable, but even I don't want to be protected all the time."
Saying 'I'm here', Usagi pushed Ouka's back.
"Suginami is still alive. She's been caught by the enemy and is together with other Spriggans. We need to hurry and save her. Please decide on the next course of action."
"....."
"Did you forget? Right now, you are our captain!"
Hearing those words, Ouka felt a weight in the centre of her chest.
It was enough for her to regain sanity.

Takeru's face appeared in her mind. She vowed to protect the platoon until he comes back.
Is she, who betrayed them qualified to protect anything?
No, it's because she betrayed them once already that she has to protect them. Suginami is alive. The Inquisitors too are still alive.
No matter how painful it is, how many times she fails, she needs to save them.
I need to stand up. I need to decide this. I need to act.
That's what a captain is.
Cleanse this stigma. This is the time to return the favour.
"...it's as...this girl says...Ootori-kun."
Suddenly, a voice came from the debris.
When Ouka and Usagi looked towards the source, they saw the commander stand there with a serious injury in the abdomen.
The two rushed towards him and supporting him, they sat him down on the rubble.
"Commander...!"
"You shouldn't feel responsible... it's all... my responsibility for not being suspicious of the orders from above."
"Please don't speak... I'll stop the bleeding...!"
Ouka placed a hand on the wound and reached towards the medical kit with the other, but commander grasped her hand.
And he slowly shook his head.
"It's too late for me. Use it on the survivors. Rather than that... there's something I need to relay to you."
Forcing his trembling body, the Commander placed a hand on Ouka's shoulder.
And stared at her as if he looked at his own daughter.
"...in the past, together with your father... I have acted together with Mineshiro Kazuma. I participated in the destruction of Insect Cage as a Spriggan."
Father. Mineshiro Kazuma. The Commander said the same thing Laugh Maker did.
"Vlad... was my father really Red Glare? What Laugh Maker said wasn't a lie?"
Facing down, she asked Vlad.
□"…….classified information. I cannot say."□
Ouka judged Vlad's mood. She didn't know why the information about Red Glare was classified, but one thing was certain, Ootori Sougetsu was trying to hide something.
"...it's true that Inquisition is trying to hide information about that person. Probably, he touched something he shouldn't have. Don't believe Inquisition... Ootori Sougetsu wants you all to..."
Breathing painfully, the Commander said so.

Ouka recalled her father's gentle face. Although he was a clumsy person who's bad at talking, there was dignity of someone who went through carnage many times. Ouka loved his big, gentle hands. She couldn't imagine the figure of her father with such gentle hands being an Inquisition's officer.
"There's no time... there's something I'd like to ask... could you save my subordinates who were taken captive because of me...?"
Summoning the last of his strength, the Commander grasped Ouka's hand.
What was passed through his hand was a compelling wish.
Ouka gripped him in return and raised her face.
"I will collect equipment, establish contact with our comrades from the other lines of defence and invade enemy territory, we'll definitely save our comrades."
"...sorry. Making you fight, is a betreyal towards Mineshiro-san... please forgive my shamelessness."
Just like Ouka did, the company's commander muttered an apology.
The company commander stopped gripping Ouka's hand and fell to the ground.
"The Relic Eater you possess... Vlad's strength wasn't... displayed yet..."
While light was disappearing from his pupils, he conveyed the last thing to her.
"Use our...blood...don't waste the feelings...of our comrades who...died he...re..."
Letting out his final breath, the man said his wish as he fell asleep.
Ouka looked at his appearance as he slept and stood up.
She saluted him as an Inquisitor, lowered her arm and looked up at the sky.
"Vlad, father... was Mineshiro Kazuma a strong man?"
"I know not thy father. However, Red Glare was not a man thou thinkst he was."
"....."
"He was an incredibly weak man. Concerned with trivial things, regretful, and he collapsed time after time again. Time after time, he said 'I don't want to do this any more'."
"...I see."
She couldn't imagine the figure of her father holding a crimson gun.
A gun didn't fit that gentle father of hers.
"However, Ouka. Nobility is not something to express through strength. Nobility is something that changes weakness into strength."
Vlad heavily, strongly, evaluated Red Glare.
"Therefore——I do not know of his nobility."
When she heard that, just for a moment,
Just for a moment——her father's back, holding guns in both hands came to her mind.
Ouka has seen a back like that before. Having no merits to him other than his sword, laughed at and told it's outdated, the back of a man who desperately fought for his comrades, for his little sister.

No matter how many times he was broken he rose up, a big back that led his comrades to fight.
Ouka burned the back *of the two* who saved her into her heart.
"Vlad... if you drink blood, will your power increase?"
"While there is a limit with the contractor's blood, the original power will be released if external blood is provided."
After saying only what's necessary, Vlad went silent.
Ouka closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Until now she thought that taking the blood of others and turning it into power is evil, she thought that it's sinful.
However, what Vlad said was that he sought noble blood.
Everyone who has died in this place were noble ones who fought until the very end. Wouldn't letting this precious blood go to waste... be a sin?
"As if I'd let that happen."
Opening her eyes widely, she stretched one hand forward.
"Vlad."
"....."
"Suck it dry. Don't waste a single drop."
All of the regret of the ones who sleep in this land, their dying wish, Ouka has decided to inherit.

"————Consecration."

The moment Vlad received its master's request, a huge magical circle appeared under her feet.
It was too large to grasp with one's eyes, and covered the company's camp.
And all of the blood that has spilled in the location has flowed to where Ouka was.
The lifeblood of her comrades spiralled and wrapped around her body.
"The blood, is a proof of a the owner's being alive... it's the proof of the owner's history. Thy shalt now inherit all of that."
"...just like I have inherited you, a gun of my father."
"Indeed. However, beware——noble blood is heavy."
Immediately after Vlad gave her an advice, a powerful pain struck Ouka and froze her body. Blood of other people has invaded her body. She was writhing, feeling as if her body was forcefully remade.
It was memories. The road dead ones have walked dwelled inside of the blood, and has engrained itself in Ouka.
"I see, certainly this is... heavy...!"
She distorted her face in anguish, clenched her teeth.
"Nh, I'll carry it...! If I'm crushed in this place, everything will go to waste!"
"Truly so. As long as thou shalt bear it, they shalt be near thee. Vanquish them all! Together with the noble blood!"
A large amount of blood was assimilated into Ouka's body and covered her as an armour.

The pain reached its peak, and the power has come into her grasp. That very moment, all memories of the dead ones flowed inside of Ouka's head. All of them, have had loved ones.
They had families. They had lovers. They had friends. They had comrades they trust.
The time of happiness of each, feelings, have flowed inside of Ouka.
The memories passed through her in a flash, and Vlad's strengthening was completed.
Inside of Ouka, the blood of her comrades concentrated and became power she was familiar with.
She felt something uncomfortable inside of her mouth. When she checked it with tongue, she found that part of her teeth were pointed and sharp.
Her vision has sharpened, and she was able to confirm the blood flow and cardiac movement of others just by looking at them.
It had a different shape from a Witch Hunt form, what wrapped Ouka's body was a thin armour that wasn't neither flesh nor a mineral. The cloak on the back has completely turned into wings, and she looked like a devil.
Even though she did look like a devil, there was no evil in it, nobility dwelled within.
The crimson wings made of blood shone nobly, even in the night.
It was one of Vlad's intrinsic magic.

「Vampire Dracula」
By converting the blood of others into magical power an enormous power is obtained, and the heretical magic transformed the contractor's body. The effect literally turned the contractor into a vampire.
「"Thou currently hast power equal to that of a vampire true ancestor. There is no need to hold back with magical power and your flesh is different from a human's. The power of noble blood... wield it as you please."」
She felt no disgust despite being turned into a heretical existence.
If anything, it felt pleasant. This power was the strength of all her comrades who died in here. Ouka grasped all she has absorbed and crossed both hands in front of her.
"Let's vanquish them, Saionji. We're rescuing our comrades!"
"——Roger!"
At the same time as Usagi responded, Ouka vigorously spread her arms. Magical power was ejected from the Pile Bunkers on her elbows and from her crimson wings.
Her sunset-coloured hair shook from the aftermath and shone tinged with magical power's light.
Ouka's appearance was truly——fitting to be described as Crimson Princess Calamity

"Until we reach the fifth laboratory Kirigaya and I will lead the way! Spriggans and Usagi are to follow us from behind!"
「"Roger!"」
She spread the crimson wings and followed the road to the fifth laboratory flying at low altitude.
Ouka confirmed that Kyouya ran by her side and paid attention to the jeep that has followed her from behind.
After assuming Vampire form, Ouka contacted Hayato through radio. There were several troops that continued to resist, and many people who were remnants from different troops joined together.
On top of having no time to gather forces, they couldn't converge and thus everyone moved to the laboratory on their own.
「"Ootori Ouka."」
A communication from Hayato came, and she focused on listening to it.
「"Enemy has Einherjars and Mechanical Dragons. Avoid fighting them if you can. It's a waste of time."」
"Understood."
「"You're closest to fifth laboratory. The enemy hasn't realized we're out to destroy the barrier system. Defence should be rather lax. Ensure we have an entrance when you arrive and wait for my arrival."」
"...I apologize captain Kurogane, but it would be better to fight even if a moment earlier. Can we rush in first?"
As Ouka advised him, Hayato fell silent.
Whenever she spoke her own opinion to him, she was always tensed up. The feeling she had back when she was EXE seemed to have been revived.

"...do you think you can do it?"
Hayato asked sharply.
Break through the enemies and destroy the barrier generator. Moreover, they have to rescue the prisoners.
However, Ouka answered with confidence.
"We can. The current us can do it."
"Got it. Then I'll shave off as many of the enemy forces as possible and head over there. You proceed ahead."
Although she was unable to read his emotions, it was unusual for Hayato to accept proposals of others.
"Ootori Ouka."
"Yes."
"——Don't die."
Hearing the short words of concern, Ouka's motivation reached it peak.
Kurogane Hayato was a captain for a long time. He gave others a strict, cold impression and it was unusual for him to think of his subordinates.
He was neither a cold nor a warm person, but he didn't lie to his comrades and treated them equal.
That was why his words motivated his subordinates.
"Understood!"
After Ouka answered strongly, the communication was cut off.
She turned around the corner at breakneck speed and checked the enemy figures ahead.
"——Stop...!"
At Ouka's instruction, Kyouya and the Jeep stopped.
Usagi's head peeked out from the Jeep's passenger seat and she checked the enemy figures ahead.
"Ten soldiers, five Einherjars... a single wyvern-type Mechanical Dragon. That's bad isn't it."
"I want to avoid pointless battles. We'll circle around them."
When Ouka proposed that, Kyouya moved in front.
"If we circle around we'll lose 10 minutes... I'll do it. You guys go ahead."
At this surprising proposal, Usagi opened her eyes wide in shock.
Ouka hesitated for a moment. She didn't want to leave Kyouya's strength in this place.
"I won't listen to your orders. They're my prey."
He put Nero on his shoulder and glared at the enemy.
"You can tell just by lookin'... they're the bunch that assaulted our company. They're leisurely returning to base."
"....."
"Unlike you I won't lose myself in revenge and crush those guys. They're our comrades' vengeance."
His glaring eyes had almost no reason left inside.
As if she saw herself until now, Ouka's heart ached.
"Hurry up and go. There ain't no time."

Ouka called out to Kyouya's back who headed towards the enemy.
"...Kirigaya, do you remember my proposal?"
"....."
"That was no lie. If you wish for it, we will help you with all we have to save Yoshimizu. If you remain under the Chairman you definitely won't save her... that man will never act in order to save someone."
Kyouya stopped his feet and spat out a sigh.
"...I know that already. But I don't know any way other than this to help her survive. I will fight, that's the only way left for me... even if that means turning into his pawn."
Unbroken, he spat out words stating as things are.
"Will you let yourself be used until the end?! If there's no way, you just have to find one!"
"....."
"Come with us! There has to be another way for you!"
As Ouka tried to persuade him, Kyouya smiled wryly looking at her from the profile.
"Then, do you think I can fight together with Kusanagi side-by-side? I'll pass on that, he'll pass too. I'll tell you this, I don't have a shred of regret for trying to kill his little sister. Back then, not killing that monster there would be the worst decision... and in particular for that little sister, being killed would definitely be the happy ending."
Kyouya snorted and shook his head.
"That's just whitewashing things. I just wanted to kill her for my revenge on heresy... I'm not going to make it sound noble."
He finished speaking and moved towards the enemy with a heavy gait.
"Go. If you don't want to lose comrades like I did, hurry up and save her."
Ouka didn't think that revenge was the only thing swirling inside him.
But she didn't have time to argue. If they can move straight from this place, they will move to the laboratory through the shortest route. She couldn't find any reason to refuse his offer.
She sent a signal to Usagi and flapped her wings.
Then, she passed by Kyouya's side at high speed.
"——I will distract the enemy, Saionji and the others are to break through after Kirigaya shoots!"
She flew grazing the ground and closed onto the enemy.
The moment Einherjars tried to look towards her, Ouka soared into the sky.
WIth the enemy's vision directed towards Ouka, the jeep started to run.
"Triple Thread——Slug Shot!"
Kyouya's shotgun deformed into a cannon and shot the enemy troop.
With the momentum of a machine gun, high density magic bullets hit the enemy.
Ouka broke through the gap in the enemy ranks and ensured the shortest route to laboratory.

□□□

Kyouya returned the gun from a rotating form to its original, then took a breath with his eyes closed.
When she passed by his side, Ouka said just one thing to him.
——Don't give up.
"....."
Splitting the heavens, starry sky has began to give out to the sunrise. He turned his tired eyes to it.
Possibly, there is alternative——
Alternative, that kind of future might exist.
It wouldn't be weird if there was a future where he didn't take Ootori Sougetsu's hand, instead he would look for a method to save Yoshimizu Akira together with Kusanagi Takeru and Ootori Ouka.
He wouldn't fall into the wrong path, and would fight justly to save Akira.
But he already took that hand. What he obtained after contracting Nero for Akira's survival, was an endless life of revenge. Once his revenge disappears, Akira's life will probably exhaust itself.
And if he betrays Ootori Sougetsu, the contract with Nero will be cancelled.
After making the choice at the beginning, there was no going back.
There was no other way than shook off everything else.
But, just a little bit.
For just a little bit, the future that was possible has caused pain in his heart.
"——.....nooow then!"
After the bombardment's smoke cleared up, he confirmed the number of enemies remaining.
There were three Einherjars. Five soldiers and one Mechanical Dragon.
"Perfect. Ain't that quite a nice line-up... right, hey, isn't that so, shitty gun?"
□"Yup yup. But Master, do you think you can function properly without decent healing? Don't come crying to Nero if you get hit by dragon's breath okay?"□
"Shut up, I just have to avoid it all right!"
The corner of his mouth distorted, and Kyouya rammed into the enemy head-on.
Focusing magical power into the cannon that fused into his right hand, he charged, running on the ground.
He avoided the enemy's furious barrage, and like a wolf pouncing on its prey, he jumped at the Mechanical Dragon's throat.
"Blow away heretics!"
The moment the cannon released an attack, the whole area was buried in dark green magic.

The vengeful demon didn't stop. He single-mindedly threaded on his path. Even if all that was ahead was despair.

Leaving Kyouya, Ouka rushed towards the laboratory.
The sound of fighting and explosions has reverberated from the distance.
Thanks to Hayato and Kyouya rampaging, there weren't many enemies attracted to Ouka and the others advancing on the road.
They couldn't afford to miss this opportunity.
"I can see the fifth laboratory!"
When she looked in the direction Usagi was pointing, she saw the central tower that was destroyed during the elf restoration experiment battle.
"Is Suginami still safe?"
"Yes... but a witch is forcing out information during interrogation. If Suginami's turn comes, our surprise attack will be exposed."
Witch... without a doubt it was Laugh Maker.
If it's her magic, it would be easy to make them speak.
"Let's hurry!"
Ouka injected magical power into the wings and accelerated, the Jeep ran down the street at full throttle.
She didn't know how many enemies were in there, but all they could do now was to rush in. Leaving the convoluted alleys, they turned right onto the main street. As they went straight through the industrial area's street, they could see the entrance to laboratory ahead of them. The partially-collapsed outer wall was a remnant from their previous visit. Although it was supposed to be closed for investigation by Inquisition. It had been occupied when the enemy invaded.
The devastated landscape made it even more grey than the Grey City.
Sitting in the centre of it——there was a single humongous dragon.
"A Mechanical Dragon... a large-type!"
The thirty-metre large body looked huge even from the position Ouka and the others were in.
After they'd gotten closer, it looked like a small hill.
Although it's figure was like that of a snake, its body was as thick as that of a whale.
"That form, a wyrm huh... it doesn't have wings but it's nasty. Not only it can use its breath, but also magic."
There were records of dragons that understood human speech and were capable of using magic. They attack with breath and assist themselves with magic, moreover the dragon scales are difficult to destroy even using modern weapons.
However, it's body was that of a machine. It had no dragon scales.
"Hah, we're doing it, Master."
"Of course. If the enemy's defence is just magic, then he's no opponent for us."
There was only one protective magic dragon could use.

「Ancient FieldKing's Area」
It was a magic possible to cast with the 「Dragon」 magical power property, magic unavailable to humans. It built pseudo-dragon scales. It was dragon magic which formed a barrier by deploying it as to cover a wide range.
However, even if it's strength was comparable to that of dragon scales, it didn't change the fact that it was magic.
As long as she entered the operative procedure in her head, no matter how strong the magic is, Vlad can penetrate it.
"There's no time to stop——we're passing by all at once!"
「"Affirmative!"」
Ouka focused and expanded the pile bunker on her right arm, and a huge magical circle appeared behind her.
Rather than make multiple operative procedures, by the huge magical circle she created multiple small magical circles with the same patterns.
Continuing with the same speed, Ouka rushed in.
When she realized the Mechanical Dragon looked up, it opened the huge mouth opening.
Going straight. Ouka flapped the wings strongly, accompanied by a red lightning bolt.
And,
"——「Blood Field's Supreme RulerVladislavus Dracula」!"
At the same time as she waved her arm, all of her magical circles were released.
When the magical circle shone exceptionally bright, the space distorted above the Mechanical Dragon.
What showed up along with a tremor was a rain and erection of sharply pointed stakes. They easily broke through the Mechanical Dragon's protective magic and its skewered body was fixed in one spot.
Furthermore, a countless number of stakes were released from the expanded small magical circles, striking the Mechanical Dragon.
Faced with inevitable attacks from all directions. Especially with its huge body, it received all of them.
Ouka tried to approach the bosom of its skewered body.
However, the Mechanical Dragon released a dragon's breath without cancelling the King's Area.
"HAAAAAAAAAAaaa!!"
She unleashed a crimson stake straight towards the released dragon's breath.
Magical power collided with magical power. There was no even confrontation, the 「Count's Fang」 she released with all she passed unhindered through the wave of dragon property and stabbed into the Wyrm's mouth.
「"Taste my fang!"」
At the same time as Vlad roared, Ouka rammed into the dragon's mouth.
Ouka broke through the dragon's mouth——moving outside.

A tremendous explosion roared, and the dragon's movements stopped. The Dragon magical property that clung to her body was blown away with the flapping of her wings, and Ouka landed on the ground.
The dragon that had its head penetrated shook, not letting out a voice and laid down after gazing at the heavens just once.
Even after subjugating the dragon, they didn't have time to rest. The Jeep that was driving behind stopped at the laboratory's entrance. Two Spriggans and Usagi have jumped out of it in a hurry.
"We shall protect this place! Ootori, destroy the barrier equipment and rescue the prisoners!"
While holding her new gun, Usagi entrusted her hopes to Ouka.
"I will be all right. As long as I have the gun Suginami made, I should be able to hold out even if enemies flock from all around!"
Staring at the figure of Usagi who turned away, Ouka nodded.
"...I leave it to you. If anything happens, contact me immediately."
"Yess, have luck in battle, Ootori!"
"The other two, please back Saionji up!"
As she said that, the two Spriggans struck the armour on their chest with fists.
"Leave it to us. It's the life you have saved... we'll return the favour with the same life."
"Getting to protect such a cute young lady, I must have exhausted my Spriggan luck. I leave our comrades to you!"
She nodded in response to their encouragement, and glared at the path she was ought to take.
The objective was destruction the barrier generator and rescue of the prisoners. It wasn't subjugation of the enemy.
This time... I won't lose my way!
The gratitude for having comrades watch her back, and the joy of having people to protect.
She was no longer just a demon who lived for revenge.
No matter how hateful the opponent is, she won't be swayed.
Breathing life into her soul, Ouka plunged into her own battlefield.

Chapter 6 - Walking Side by Side

"Mari! Is it this way?!"
Takeru asked Mari while running through the Grey City.

Kanaria ran right beside him, and Mari was carried by Takeru in a princess carry.
Since there was a possibility of being found out by the enemy if they flew through the sky, reluctantly he held her in his arms like this. Mari laughed blissfully and didn't pay attention whether they're going left or right, she immersed herself in clinging to Takeru's chest.
"Ehe, ehehe... I expected to take a step ahead in the Magic Academy and get in the lead, but my share of an entire month I believed in was stolen by a little girl... to think I would be able to feel something this wonderful after coming backk ehehehehehehe, this is happinesss."
Kanaria who was running beside pinched Mari's nose with her fingers strongly.
"Borbble! Bat 'ou doong...!"
"Don't go deredere here. Think of the circumstances. Is your guidance really okay?"
While asking Mari who pressed onto her nose with tears in her eyes, Kanaria asked the same thing to Takeru with her gaze. Mari pouted and raised an objection.
"Hmmm... fifth laboratory right? It's this way, believe me, I know this place."
"Last time we came here you got lost, so you have no credibility though..."
As Takeru said so anxiously, Mari got easily dismayed.
"I-it's allll rightt! Last time I got lost since it was an underpass okay? If we go straight here we'll see it sooonn."
Because of Mari's confidence which couldn't be trusted, he's gotten even more anxious.
After hearing of the 35th platoon's current situation from Nagaru, Takeru grew impatient.
If the enemy is Ootori's foe... if possible I want to be beside her. I said we'll walk together... I can't let her fight alone.
They spent a moderately long time together and the ice around her heart has finally melted. He promised to shoulder half of her burden, and walk alongside her.
He has to be there when Ouka exacts her revenge.
While Takeru got increasingly more frustrated, Kanaria sent a sidelong glance at him.
"I don't really get it, but what will we do if we survive? Who will we join?"
"Hey! It's not time to think about that, right?!"
"Didn't ask Mari!"
Kanaria retorted to Mari again.
Takeru answered her question while looking ahead.

"After picking up our comrades, we will rejoin Student Council President. The dissidents seem to have a hideout, we'll head there."
"Those guys, how big are they?"

"I don't know too well but... dissidents from various organizations seem to gather there. From Fantasy CultValhalla, Ethics Committee, Inquisition. We intend to decide on what do we do after we hear everything from President."
"So, no plan, is it... well, as long as Kana gets to meet with Suginami Ikaruga, it's fine."
Facing sideways, Kanaria cast down her gaze because of the complex feeling she had. He persuaded her that she should speak with Ikaruga, and took her together with them to the outside world. He wanted to grant her that wish no matter what.
But before that, there was one thing he had to confirm first.
"You two, there's something I want to tell you."
In response to his meek voice, the two stared at Takeru.
"From now onwards, we will definitely be surrounded by enemies. There's a mountain of things we have to do. And most of them... are my problems."
" "....." "
"In order to save Kiseki, I think that a battle with Inquisition's side will be inevitable. In other words,"
Takeru stopped his legs and said.
"——The entire world will turn into our enemies."
With a resolved expression Takeru continued.
"I'm glad that you came to help me, even though I believe in you, if there was a situation where we might lose our lives... give priority to yourself."
" "....." "
"You have your own goals. Don't die, fulfil them no matter what. Whether you act cowardly or cruel, survive no matter what."
After saying that, he focused on running again.
Kanaria and Mari stared at Takeru's face and spat out a sigh.
"Kana didn't say she'll save you. She has no such intention. However, while I don't get it, there's one thing I want to say."
"I know what you're trying to say. For you Takeru, it's something quite decent. But can I say one thing from myself?"
While Takeru stared at the two puzzled, they spoke in unison.
" "Same to you." "
Good grief, really.

□□□

In front of the fifth laboratory's entrance, there was an open area. For convenience, the buildings were levelled and anti-magic material was mined from it.
Usagi left the cargo of the Jeep in an open area and listened to the report from her comrades.

"Alley in the south-southwest... enemies confirmed. Three HeroesEinherjars are heading over."
"They're coming from the old road in the southeast too... five of them here. They should be visible in a minute."
"...roger that."
Usagi calmly received the report from the two KnightsSpriggans who were scouting.
She took down a large amount of ammunition from the Jeep and loaded the magazines into the gun Ikaruga has developed.
Now that she took a look at the gun's surface, she saw the name "Rabbit Fang" engraved on its surface.
"Usagi, I'll explain once again... that gun of yours won't work properly without my support. I'm still alive, but I don't know what will happen in a minute... if you become unable to use the gun, run away."
Ikaruga advised Usagi through the gun.
"Understood... by the way, can it really fire both normal bullets and processed anti-magic bullets?"
As Usagi asked, Ikaruga chuckled.
"It can. No matter what material is it, Philosopher's StoneNanomachines can remake it into a different substance. Whether its iron, lead or gold, it can be convert it into mithril or weiss crystal bullets."
"It's so abrupt I can't believe it... but if you say so, it must be true."
"Since it's an artificial Magical Heritage it doesn't need gunpowder, if it runs out of magical power it can shoot bullets with it. However, because of that the thermal runaway's heat will go wild so be careful."
An artificial Magical Heritage with Nanomachines embedded inside... just listening to that made her head hurt. Were Inquisition to learn of it, they would be immediately sent to prison.
Moreover... there were those bullets shining with rainbow and grey colours stored in a separate case.
When Usagi heard their description, she was horrified.
The rainbow bullet aside, she didn't want to use the grey bullet if possible.
The reason she arranged the two Spriggans on the roof was in case she has to use this bullet.
"They'll appear to you soon! Finish them while we restrain them!"
As soon as she heard the report, tension ran through Usagi. She took a small breath and it stopped.
She expanded the bi-pod on the ground, aimed the barrel and looked through the scope.
In the middle of the main street. Where two roads merged, appeared eight Einherjar machines.
"Can you tell what's the enemy armour's material?"
"It's made from adamantium."
"Understood. Material conversion, dalium."

In response to Ikaruga's words of power, the gun vibrated faintly. At this very moment, the normal ammunition probably has been mutated into dalium that's effective against adamantium.
It wasn't time to shoot yet. She'll wait until they come to 300 metres distance and sink it all at once.
Five seconds.
Usagi started the countdown and waited for the enemy.
Four, three, two, one————now!
At the same time as Usagi's countdown ended, machine-gun bullets from the rooftop of buildings on both sides showered the Einherjars. When the enemy stopped hovering in the air and tried to aim its gun, Usagi started shooting.
She aimed the centre of the sight at the unmoving enemy and squeezed the trigger.
Instantly, a bullet has been fired with a roar akin to a thunder.
The bullet flew in a straight line and hit the Einherjars right shoulder, piercing it.
The gun's aim was off, but Usagi didn't care about that.
"Sorry, I still haven't finished the firing adjustment."
"It's no problem."
Saying so shortly, Usagi started rapid fire towards the eight machines.
Out of eight shots, four bullets hit. She sank down five out of eight machines, and blew away legs of one more.
Two millimetres below the centre.
She adjusted the gun's reticle, read the wind speed and calculated the trajectory.
——There it is.
The enemy aimed a railgun towards her.
A magical bullet passed by her, hit and destroyed the wall. The debris was blown away, and even as Usagi seemed like she'd be buried under it, she didn't close her eyes and continued to focus.
And——
"——……!!"
She held her breath and shot accurately. All the bullets she fired directly hit the enemy's head.
Usagi lowered her gaze and checked the gun. She wasn't blown back, but the recoil was quite powerful, making it seem as if her shoulders would get blown off. She was surprised that the recoil when firing with magical power was this small.
There was nothing to criticize about its power. This rifle was capable of destroying a Magical Dragoon with a single blow. The capability allowing it to convert processed anti-magic bullets made it a supreme article for snipers.
"While a bit stubborn, it's a good gun."
"Of course it is, I made it for you."

"But, it's regrettable that the gun's recoil is so strong, and the gunshot is loud..."
Because of that, enemies will gather around her. As expected, from the roads on the both sides of main street, new enemies emerged immediately.
"When enemies gather together, use the auroral bullets."
As she was told, she loaded the bullets directly and aimed into the enemy's centre. The bullet was clad with rainbow-coloured light and hit the enemy's chest."
The moment Einherjar was about to fall down on its back, aurora-coloured magic exploded from inside of its armour.
The explosion hit the four other machines, a single blow has slain three Einherjars at once.
"As expected of Nikaido's magic."
Auroral Bullet. As the name suggested, it was Mari's magic absorbed into a magic absorbent material and made an instant charm. Before Mari left AntiMagic Academy together with Takeru, she cooperated with Ikaruga to develop a new weapon.
The auroral bullet that was already powerful by itself had been further strengthened by being fired from a gun. Since the two Spriggans were doing a good job, her first attack was able to hit the enemy directly.
However, the enemies weren't fools. Hearing the sounds of battle, more and more of them has gathered.
They cast protective magic and ignored the two Spriggans. The three machines launched an attack on Usagi.
"Use the grenade launcher gadget."
As told by Ikaruga, Usagi mounted the grenade launcher below the barrel and loaded it.
The grenade itself was a smoke grenade, but Nanomachines in the gun began to remake its structure.
And when the enemy moved closer to the distance of 50 metres, Usagi fired grenades at buildings on the both sides of them.
Soon enough, a sparkling red-brown smoke diffused.
Despite the smoke wrapping around them, the Einherjars continued to rush at her.
Next, Usagi fired dalium bullets from a short distance. Although there should be a protective magic stretched in front of the Einherjars, her bullets hit the target. The contents of the grenade were changed into high quality scarlet-coloured gold that had an anti-magical effect and neutralized enemy's magic by spraying the magic-decaying dust.
Usagi continued to successfully defend the laboratory's entrance.
Great! At this rate——!
I'll somehow manage to hold out until Ootori returns. Just when she thought so.
"——It's a dragon!! Usagi-chan, run awayy!!"

The Spriggan's yell roared through the intercom, and the building he was on was crushed like a toy.
Seeing her comrade's life taken in an instant, Usagi was at loss for words.
What appeared from the other side of the collapsed building was a three-headed huge Mechanical Dragon.
Although it didn't have many heads, its figure was similar to that of a mythological Hydra.
It was no time to falter. The Hydra crawled with its mechanical body in her direction.
With a trembling hand Usagi loaded the remaining auroral bullets and fired all of them at it.
It wasn't enough to take down the enormous body. There was nowhere near enough bullets to defeat the Hydra.
「"Use the anti-matter bullet!"」
"...b-but... I'll hit an ally!!"
There was one Spriggan still remaining on the building nearby.
If she used that bullet here, he would definitely disappear along with the neighbouring buildings.
Deciding in her mind that she can't afford to shoot it, Usagi tried to fight back with normal bullets, but suddenly an explosion has happened on the back of Hydra's head.
The Hydra's attention was directed behind it.
「"Usagi-chan... shoot it."」
Behind the Hydra, there was a figure of a Spriggan who came out from the building and thrown away the cylinder of a disposable rocket launcher.
Continuing, he started to shoot at the Hydra with a machine gun in order to garner its attention.
「"Shoot! If we don't stop them here, everything will be for naught!"」
Usagi hesitated seeing the Spriggan run out of bullets and fight back with a handgun next.
Not only the Hydra, but also newly arrived Einherjars have headed for the Spriggan.
「"It's a request from a comrade!"」
Hearing those words, Usagi raised a face with a bitter expression on it.
She quickly removed the bullet shining with grey from the backpack and loaded it.
Put her finger on the trigger, and,
"...nh, roger!"
Shedding tears, she aimed at the back of the Hydra that has turned blurry and squeezed the trigger.
The bullet hit right before the dragon breath was unleashed.
At the same time as it landed, the scenery in front of Usagi was swallowed by light.
It was a muddy stream of light of annihilation. Usagi was blown away by the impact immediately after that.

It was the magic Ikaruga used during elf restoration experiment prevention when she fused with elven cells, 「AnnihilationCatastrophe」. Ikaruga saved some of the elven cells and after turning herself into one with Nanomachines, she created a tiny amount of antimatter and embedded it inside of the bullet in vacuum.
Because of the impact Usagi was blown into a wall and almost lost consciousness.
"...gh...not yet.. I can't fall asleep...!"
Mustering all her strength, Usagi stood up by using the gun like a cane.
The buildings caught up in the explosion have turned into rubble. The hit enemies were not there. Ikaruga's 「Catastrophe」 could erase any armour or material.
——However, the enemy reinforcements did not stop coming. Two wyvern-type Mechanical Dragons have surged from the other side of the rubble and captured Usagi in their sights with their cold mechanical pupils.
"...I don't have any more auroral or antimatter bullets! Enemy's armour is made from orichalcum! Please convert the matter!"
「"....."」
"Suginami... what happened?!"
「"Sorry, Usagi. It seems like this is it for me."」
Hearing Ikaruga's tense voice, Usagi's heart started to beat rapidly.
「"...right now, the enemy is in front of me, smiling."」
Ikaruga was calm, she was aloof in any situation.
Usagi was always bad at dealing with Ikaruga who gave off such a feeling.
「"Make sure you survive. At least until you can properly tell Kusanagi you love hi——"」
The voice was interrupted and the gun in Usagi's hands stopped vibrating.
"Suginami...? Suginami!"
Even as she called, there was no response. All there was, was the cold gun.
She was overwhelmed by the desperate situation.
"...nhh... I won't...lose!"
However, Usagi loaded the magazine and squeezed the gun.
She was entrusted with this by the two Spriggans, she couldn't afford to give up. Ouka will definitely save Ikaruga before she's killed. What she herself should do, was to defend the entrance.
As long as there are bullets remaining. As long as she has this gun.
As long as she's still alive——she will never abandon the will to fight. She definitely won't die until Takeru comes back.
"I will protect my comrades!"
Usagi clenched her teeth and resumed rapid fire.
The processed mithril bullets couldn't even scratch the Mechanical Dragon. Usagi knew that already. And yet, she couldn't move from this location. The dragon opened its mouth and took off after spreading its wings. While looking at Usagi from the sky, a breath shone in its mouth.
And——

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Yamata no Orochi!"

——An azure-coloured shadow cut the Wyvern in half starting from its brain.

"【Aurora Cannon】!"

——A bullet of rainbow-coloured light hit the side of the other Wyvern that was also about to unleash its breath. Its body shook and it released the breath in a different direction.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Mantis Slope!"

Furthermore, a blue-haired shadow dropped from far in the sky, crushing the Wyvern's head.
The Mechanical Dragon exploded, scattering Dragon property magical power in the surroundings. Seeing two Mechanical Dragons destroyed in an instant, Usagi was in daze.
Was she dreaming?
In the flames and smoke, she certainly saw that figure.
"...n-no way... can't be...?"
Usagi left the gun on the ground and started to walk wobbly, scattering tears all around. Her pace gradually increased and before long, she started running.

"——nn...you're late! You are late!!"

Ahead, in the place she ran to, he was there. The one they didn't know whether he's alive or not, they lost contact with and left to some distant place.
Sheathing the azure-coloured sword, the boy proudly walked towards Usagi, and she——
"It seems like I made it in time. Are you okay, Usa——woahh?!"
She jumped nearly five metres distance and threw her arms around his body.
Takeru momentarily released Witch Hunt form and firmly held her.
"Wa… U-Usagi?"
He was puzzled as he pat Usagi's head that was buried in his chest.
With a bright red face and tears in her eyes, Usagi pressed her cheeks against Takeru.
"…welcome back…. Kusanagiii…"
She congratulated Takeru on his return with voice full of relief.
Despite the confusion he smiled softly and slowly stroked Usagi's head.
"…I'm back. Sorry to make you wait."
Takeru too felt that tears were about to appear in his eyes, but desperately withstood it.
When the two embraced each other, a woman wearing a hat has come up from the side and hugged him in the same way Usagi did.
"I'm back. Takeru."
Seeing Mari who was with him the entire time hug him for no reason, Takeru was agape.
"…eh."
"…what?!"
"No, why are you…"
"Ehh! This is where you pat me in the same way right?!"
Go on! Because Mari requested it, he patted her despite feeling doubtful.
She laughed contentedly, said "well done!" and stretched her flat chest.
Takeru made a 'what's with her' expression.
Usagi separated from Takeru and looked at Mari while wiping tears off.
"You as well Nikaido, it's great that you came back safely… really."
After Takeru, Usagi hugged Mari next. While Mari was slightly surprised, she returned the hug with a smile.
"Yupp, I'm back Usagi-chan. I promised."
Usagi didn't reject Mari who started rubbing her cheeks on her and smiled at ease.
While the three people happily reunited beside her, Kanaria stared at them intensely.
"…what's this, Takeru's harem?"
"D-don't say such things! It's just we're glad to reunite with our comrades!"
"I don't really care, but I think it's not time for that."
While Kanaria said so rudely while looking to the side, Usagi stared at her and tilted her head puzzled.

"Umm... this person is?"
"Explanations later. For now, I'm ally. That's all you need to know. Takeru, we need to hurry."
Takeru nodded at Kanaria's reminder and placed a hand on Usagi's shoulder.
"I've heard what's the situation from Student Council President. Where's Suginami and Ootori?"
"...Suginami was captured by the enemy. Ootori went to rescue her and destroy the barrier generator, she's inside of the laboratory."
Takeru narrowed his eyes for just a moment and calmly listened to Usagi's explanation.
"Lapis."
When he called the name of his partner, Lapis appeared right beside him.
"I want you to find Ootori's and Suginami's position."
"I have already found it. Suginami-sama along with many other prisoners is in the basement of fifth laboratory's central tower. Ootori-sama seems to be currently entering the underground."
"As expected of you. It's a great help."
"One more thing. Enemy reinforcements are approaching from behind. All of the enemies who fought the surprise attack of Inquisition's remnants are aiming for fifth laboratory... their target seems to have changed to us. Enemy seems to have learned our objective. Majority of them was cleaned up by Kurogane Hayato-sama, but quite a few still remain."
Hearing Lapis' report, Usagi hung her head down.
Surely, enemy has pulled out information from Ikaruga. Noticing that Usagi was almost being crushed by anxiety, Takeru placed a hand on her head.
"It's all right. I'll definitely save her."
"...Kusanagi."
"Don't worry. Mari, Kanaria, sorry but..."
When Takeru called them, the two were already turned around.
"I know I know. We're to stall them here right? Hurry up and go, then come back with those two."
"Nn. We're defending here right? Mari, don't hold me back."
"I don't want to be told that by useless elf."
"U-useless?! Did you say useless?! Why useless?!"
While quarrelling, Mari expanded magical circles and Kanaria unsheathed Lævateinn.
After confirming that, Takeru turned to Usagi once again.
"Usagi, assist those two. I leave this place to you."
A little bit reluctant, she lightly bit her lower lips and nodded strongly in response to Takeru's request.
"I leave those two to you."
"Yeah. Leave it to me."
Takeru said so and directed his body towards the fifth laboratory. He raised his arm in front of him and closed his eyes.

"Let's conquer... Lapis."
"Yes, Host."
Slowly exhaling, Takeru spun words of power.
Desiring with supreme ardor——"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"
Raising a signal for the battle to start.
——The Hammer of Witches"——Malleus Maleficarum!"
Seeing the back clad in azure-coloured armour, Usagi once again returned to her own battle.

□□□

Fifth Laboratory's underground facility was something made for investigating durability of fantastical organisms.
It looked like an arena and scratches as well as blood could be seen on the walls.
In the centre of the site was placed a giant crystal. Since black like ink characters flowed on its surface, it could be recognized as a product of magic at a glance.
"□♪"
Beside the crystal that let out a heavy bass sound was a woman humming a song and flailing her legs like a child. She sat on a chair and with a book opened on top of her knees she read it happily. The book's title was □Canary's house□.
"...a wonderful story. This Kanaria bird went to heaven happy, right?"
The woman closed the book and stroked it with affection.
"I love happy endings... people do need to die while laughing after all. You guys think so too, right?"
With a smile, she——Laugh Maker looked around.
On the ground around her, there was a lot of blood and entrails. Remnants of humans lied there as if messily preyed on by an animal. Without doubt, those humans have killed and eaten each other.
Not only Inquisitors, but also many Pureblood Party members were mixed in among them.
Most of them were Laugh Maker's, Mimulus Wallenstein's subordinates.
Everyone died with a big, uniform, distorted smile.
"Dying while laughing... is happiness right?"
Even as she spoke to them benevolently, the dead didn't open their mouths.
——The bizarre murderer Laugh Maker did it solely out of good intentions.
After her body and mind were destroyed by □Red Butterfly's Insect Cage□, she was implanted a single lesson.
□"No matter how difficult it is you need to laugh. Otherwise you won't go to heaven."□

The trainers gently reminded her as a child, then beat her up.
"No matter how cruelly you're treated, only laughing people will be praised by God. Dying while laughing is the greatest happiness for humans."
While saying so, the trainer taught her the ways to kill people.
The Insect Cage's teachers understood her magical property and the thinking of a child.
Radiance property was good at reinforcement magic and unsuited to killing people directly.
However, if reinforcement magic went to the extreme, it could kill people.
But when she displayed some potential on the verge of dying, they nurtured her to become a killer. As not to make her catch on that killing people is something negative, they planted a positive impression in her by using the word 'laugh', and trained her while giving her a perception that she isn't doing anything bad.
What resulted from that was a psychotic killer not even Insect Cage knew what to do with.
Although she has been told not to kill people unless requested, after Insect Cage disappeared and no longer controlled her, there was no one to stop her *charity work*. That's why Valhalla sealed her memory in order to take advantage of her unique abilities and brought her up once again among the Pureblood Party.
The reason Eliza dropped her on the battlefield, was to get rid of her.
Laugh Maker was a weapon even West Side couldn't control.
She wanted people to die while laughing. She wanted to give the suffering a death while laughing, she wanted to give it to everyone. Because she acted on such pure desire and killed anyone she could, for Valhalla she was an even more troublesome existence than Haunted.
"When this fight is over, I think of going over there like you all. If I laugh while tasting the despair... I'm sure I'll be able to go to heaven. I should be able to go to a place where there's nothing painful, right?"
When she realized she had tears in one of her eyes, Laugh Maker did her best to laugh.
"Crying is no good... I finally found the existence that will grant me death... if I laugh then, I'll surely go to heaven."
With hope her eyes regained shine. Tears vanished and a glitter dwelled inside.
"...a little more patience, come on... soon, that girl will do it."
Spreading both of her hands, she looked towards the ceiling to welcome her hope.
Among the dead bodies and sea of blood, immediately after she reached out towards her salvation.
——The girl she has been longing for has come.

□□□

Ouka entered the basement, and after learning there was a cavity below her feet she pulverized the floor with a fang.
She jumped to the experimental grounds like a meteorite. Even though she was guessing why was there this many corpses in this place, Ouka raised her face and captured her enemy in sight.
Her hateful enemy was sitting on the chair and smiled.
"I've been waiting, Ouka."
An unwavering smile was there.
Ouka stood up and started to walk towards her slowly.
The second confrontation. Although the hatred that disturbed her mind didn't change, Ouka asked without hesitation.
"...where are the prisoners."
"They're here. Below your feet."
"The number of bodies doesn't match. Where are they."
She ignored Laugh Maker's provocation and while glaring sharply she requested the information she wanted.
Laugh Maker stared at Ouka who lwas letting out murderous intent and slowly raised her waist from the chair.
"Forcing yourself is no good. Your hatred is making my skin crawl even now. I know you want revenge."
"....."
"But why aren't you laughing? Why are you not smiling while killing your hateful enemy? You're happy right? Meeting me."
"....."
"You see, I was to be used and disposed off after this operation. So you see? Since it'll come anyway, I thought of letting myself get killed by you. That's why, you need to laugh and kill me okay? Come on, laugh?"
Welcoming her with open arms, Laugh Maker moved closer to Ouka.
In front of Ouka, at a distance where she could feel her breathing there was a nauseating smile. She wanted to kill her immediately. She wanted to tear her apart, she wanted to make her suffer more than her dead family has. She didn't do so because her objective was saving her comrades, and she felt a certain discomfort.
"I want to ask something. Something I don't know."
"Whaat is it?"
"——You, are you really Laugh Maker?"
Having her existence being suspected, Laugh Maker blinked many times.
"Did you forget the face of your enemy?"
"No. You are the hateful enemy who killed my family."
"Then, what does that question mean?"

"What I'm asking, is not whether you're my enemy. I'm asking if you are the bizarre murderer called Laugh Maker that I've heard of."
Unable to understand it, Laugh Maker tilted her head puzzled.
Ouka continued indifferently.
"The Laugh Maker I knew, was just a madman."
"I'm not mad or anything. I just want all people to die while smiling. If they die with a smile they'll go to heaven. I want everyone to learn that."
Although her motivation for killing people was crazy, Ouka confirmed one thing.
She confronted a bizarre murderer who committed heinous crimes, and confirmed that she was experienced in murder.
"That's right. Right now you aren't insane. A madman with an objective definitely *wouldn't desire her own death*."
For just an instant, Laugh Maker's cheek convulsed. Ouka didn't miss that momentary change.
"You said that your objective is to kill people as they laugh right? Then why do you wish to die? Why do you provoke me to kill you? There's still many poor lambs struggling, suffering and despairing. Don't you think it's strange for a madman to die first without saving them?"
Ouka poked a hole in Laugh Maker.
Although she was originally a madman, something had happened and changed her, gouging a wound in her. Ouka pressed a letter she held in her hand to Laugh maker. Pushed back by Ouka slightly she took a step back and opened the letter.
"It's a certain person's testament one of my comrades recovered. Judging from the content of this suicide note, he was the person who sealed your memories and re-educated you to become a proper human from a clean state. Am I right?"
"....."
"...and, despairing because of the fact he was unable to eliminate Laugh Maker's darkness, he committed suicide while looking at his beloved adoptive daughter."
When she dropped her gaze at the characters, Ouka added salt to her wound.
"However, his good intentions weren't in vain. Because in fact, he was successful in teaching you proper morals and the meaning of happiness."
Laugh Maker raised her face and looked at Ouka expressionlessly.
While still glaring at Laugh Maker, Ouka pointed a finger at her.
"The reason you wish to die, is because you can't stand memories of you as Laugh Maker. If that's the case, then that's different from being insane. They aren't memories an ordinary human can stand. Sadness, suffering, guilt, regret... right now you're feeling these emotions. That's why you desire death."
"....."

"You are no longer the Laugh Maker from back then. You are a pitiful sinner called Mimulus Wallenstein who used to be Laugh Maker."
Ouka's lips arced and she looked down on Laugh Maker——on Mimulus.

"Stop pretending to be a madman. I'm losing my motivation to kill you."

With these words she was chased to the cliff's edge, a shadow appeared on Mimulus' face as she hung her head.
The suicide note she held in hand was crushed loudly. Mimulus' shoulders trembled, and her lips let out a sob-like voice.
However, even though there were only remnants of it, it didn't change the fact that she was Laugh Maker.
The corners of her mouth distorted and she laughed loudly.
"Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha! Stupid girl... what are you saying? I'm Laugh Maker. If you don't want to kill me then I'll live as you wish. I'll send you to heaven smiling! As you say, that's my mission!"
She moved backwards away from Ouka and summoned red butterfly wings.
The moment Ouka felt a tremor below her feet, the testing grounds shutter walls opened vigorously.
What appeared were Magical Dragoons. There were ten of them.
And an ominous magical power overflowed from all their bodies.
OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOooooo!
The loud spine-chilling roar was too organic to be mechanical. Blood vessels emerged on the armour's surface and pulsated. The artificial muscles bulged out abnormally and desperately tried to escape the armour.
It was the proof they were reinforced with 「Radiance」 magical property's magic.
Although they were nameless Einherjars, after being reinforced they were a serious threat.
「"The strengthening magic 「Charge Glitter」 huh... destroy the magic's nucleus and the outer shell."」
Baring her fangs, Ouka manifested pile bunkers on both of her arms.
With the same timing, four Einherjars attacked from all directions at speed one hardly keep up with with their eyes.
That speed was comparable to that of Kusanagi Takeru's Magic-Sweeping SwordSoumatou.
After looking away from them just for an instant, she saw the enemy approached her from the front.
「"Don't falter. Currently thou art the king of fantastical organisms, a vampire true ancestor."」
That's right. Just as Vlad said, currently not only Ouka's body but also her brain was not human.
The Dragon was also called the king of fantastical organisms the same as vampires, but that was because it wasn't just their threat evaluated, but also their fertility.

However, normal apostles and true ancestors were on a completely different level.
Before the Witch Hunt War, they were called a race wishing for humanity's destruction and drinking human blood——the existences called Einherjars had flocked to vampires like moths to a flame.
Ouka parried the two machines with railblades with the piles on her elbow. While both of her hands were busy one more machine swung the sword at her, but Ouka has blown it away with just a kick.
The blown away Einherjar hit the two behind it and all of them crashed into the wall behind.
Five machines were approaching from behind. Not only Ouka's sense of smell, but all five senses were beyond that of humans, on top of knowing how to stop the enemy attacks she already knew what to do next.
She deflected railblades of the two machines and turned around in quick succession to the five machines she thrust the pile bunkers forward and released the piles.
——*gongg!* The huge piles slid down from her upper arms and were launched with a distorted sound, broke through two Einherjars and obliterated them.
"——Haa!"
Ouka swung the remaining piles protruding from her upper arm like a sword and blown away the bodies of three machines.
"Good grief, thou hasn't even penetrated the magic."
Vlad's appalled voice sounded in her head.
Even though it was as he said, Ouka didn't care.
She ensured the destruction of the two machines.
"The captives should be nearby, I can't afford to use wide-ranged magic."
"As you say. Crush them with fangs."
"That's my intention."
"But beware, once blood runs out the Vampire form will be released. You have 10 minutes left."
"Yeah——let's end this quickly!"
She finished listening to Vlad's advice and readied the pile bunker, then started an intensive assault on the Einherjars by the wall. Ouka outstretched her wings and flew, kicked off the ceiling and descended.
Swinging her arm while going down like a meteor, she unleashed the Count's Fang.
But the Einherjars didn't remain silent.
While letting out a shudder-inducing roar, they shoot magical bullets from the rubble.
Their power was comparable to that of Vlad's fangs. However, that only mattered if it hit.
"!!"
Ouka twisted her body and changed trajectory in the air.

At the same time as she passed by the magical bullets, Ouka crushed two enemies with fangs.
The magical bullet hit the ceiling and exploded, showering the testing grounds with debris. It would be bad to prolong the battle for too long. Einherjars will bury this place under ground.
Ouka turned her body and soared in the sky again, taking aim at the enemy below.
The remaining six machines were all aiming their railguns at her.
——I'll stop them!
Momentarily she returned the pile bunkers into gun form and began rapid fire with Wallachia's specialized physical attack.
In gun form, the stake's attack speed raises up to five times. Ouka's attacks struck the railguns of all six machines and succeeded on bursting the magic that was charging the gun.
While the blast swayed her hair, Ouka squinted looking at the testing grounds wrapped in smoke.
When Ouka opened her eyes widely, she saw six machines let out smoke from their jets in unison and jump.
They didn't have weapons, they entered close combat swinging their mechanical arms.
Ouka immediately changed the guns into pile bunkers and fought back. Although she destroyed one with a fang, three machines attacked he from behind.
"□Bloody Enchant□...!"
She focused magical power on her feet, and with the magical enchant she delivered a roundhouse kick. Although it had a narrow range because it's magic for close combat, Ouka's legs were tinged with something like a sharp laser and the cut Einherjars in half.
Two left!
Doing a half turn using the roundhouse kicks momentum, Ouka spread her wings to try dealing with the remaining enemies.
When she ejected magical power and soared up to the ceiling, lured in with Ouka's movement was a single machine that stretched its left hand and grabbed her leg from underneath.
She attempted to crush the enemy's head with a heel kick, but the aim was slightly off and she hit its shoulder. Although she cut through its body, she didn't finish it off.
The enemy grasped Ouka's leg and pulled her in with tremendous strength, then attempted to perform a nelson hold with its right arm. Ouka and the Einherjar fell, losing balance. They crashed into the ground while still facing up.
"Khh...!"
The Einherjar didn't release her even after the fall and held Ouka's body as she struggled. The reinforced artificial muscles let out a sound of tearing and Einherjar roared with laughter-like voice.

Wary of Einherjar's movement, Ouka jumped up to the ceiling.
When she stopped the propulsion by the ceiling, Einherjar expanded a huge magical circle.
Seeing the pattern on magical circle, she understood what was it trying to do.
A magic concentrating all the magic possessed in one's body and inducing an explosion.
【Glorious Death Burst】
The enemy performed a suicide bombing, it was trying to collapse the tower on the testing grounds.
"...I won't... let yoooouuuuuu!!"
Ouka accelerated blood flow throughout her body, her blue eyes were dyed deep red.
Cracks appeared on the armour Einherjar was clad in. The cracks spread instantly, and Ouka torn apart both the artificial muscles and the metal skeleton.
She slammed a fang into the Einherjar that had an arm crushed and immediately leaped to ceiling, spreading her wings wide.
Ouka released the mechanisms on both arms and expanded a huge pile bunker on her right arm.
And she thrust the pile into the enemy who attempted to perform suicide bombing.
"【Reverse Crucifixion Nosferatu】!"
The stake pierced through the Einherjar's body and its body was blown to pieces, turning into debris it poured down near Laugh Maker.
"....."
Sitting on a wooden chair, Laugh Maker watched Ouka's battle.
Not paying attention to the falling debris of Einherjar, she continued to stare at Ouka.
Gallantly spreading crimson wings, Ouka landed in front of Laugh Maker.
And, she aimed the gun at Laugh Maker's forehead.
"There's no point trying anything. You won't be able to beat the current me with just reinforcement magic's assistance."
What Ouka said was correct. No matter how abnormal the reinforcement magic's performance is, in the end it's just support. It's not suitable for combat, let alone facing Ouka who's an organism on a different level now.
Mass-produced Magical Dragoons weren't a match for her.
"True... you're strong. I admit."
"....."
"So? What will you do? Kill me?"
Questioned, Ouka closed her eyes, clenched her teeth and calmed her heart.
It was her goal for many years, taking revenge on her foe.
She asked herself if there's any meaning in giving it up and leaving this woman alive.
".....no."

Ouka discarded her emotions and choose the way which would allow her to save her comrades and *take revenge* at the same time.
"Release the captives and surrender. I won't kill you. There's no worth in killing you."
"....."
"I can't call killing someone who wants to die 'revenge'. I'll have you imprisoned in contraindicated area's deepest prison, *I'll make it so you'll be barely alive*."
Laugh Maker giggled at Ouka's decision.
It was as if she was a child laughing at a toy.
"I see... so in the end you can't be honest with your feelings can you. You should honestly kill me and laugh, what a waste."
She raised her face slowly and looked at Ouka with empty eyes.
"I'll remind you then, about your wound."
The grimace too distorted to be called a smile was just like the Laugh Maker's from the past——Ouka hadn't noticed the surprise attack.
A sharp pain ran through her waist and she lost her voice. When she looked behind over the shoulder, stunned, she saw a girl wearing a white coat in there. The black-haired girl's eyes were vacant, holding a silver knife in her hand she pierced it deeply into Ouka... it was Suginami Ikaruga who should have been her comrade.
"Sugi...nami...?"
Ikaruga turned her pale face towards Ouka.
And,

" Laugh "

At the same time, Laugh Maker ordered Ikaruga to the worst thing.
While her face was convulsing, Ikaruga smiled to Ouka.
The knife was withdrawn and blood spilled from the cut.
Strength left Ouka's entire body and she fell on the floor.
"Spirit silver...!"
As Vlad raised a distorted eerie voice, Laugh Maker grinned and laughed.
"Indeed, the natural enemy of vampires. Your comrade is amazing. No matter what material it is, she can convert it into a different material, what an unbelievable ability"
Laugh Maker stood up from the chair and came up to Ouka who was on her knees.
She wrapped both of her hands around Ouka's cheeks and expanded red butterfly wings on her back.
"You seem to be misunderstanding reinforcement magic. Although it's true that it's support oriented, but if you investigate it properly you'll learn you can do anything with it."
"...ga...u..."

"Reinforcement eliminating sound. Reinforcement eliminating smell. I can even erase someone's presence with strengthening magic. And if you investigate more and more..."
Releasing her hands from Ouka, this time Laugh Maker hugged Ikaruga from behind and smiled.
"With ancient magic 【Enforcement End Order】... you can freely move someone else's body."
The 【End Order】 was born from the strengthening magic that has evolved starting with an ancient war. The 【Song of Slavery Master-Slave】 Mephistopheles attempted to use before was said to be its prototype, but strictly speaking their effects were different. This magic didn't grasp the mind but took control of flesh, and the amount of magic required was very, very small.
The wounded on the battlefield and unable to move were forced to continue the battle by nefarious magic. A 【Radiance】 property holder in the past was a dictator who deprived many humans of freedom by using this magic, the amount of magical power required to build an entire country was very small. Similarly to 【Possession Install】, it's a forbidden magic not recorded for the posterity.
It doesn't exist in the Inquisition's database. It wasn't attraction nor Install, it just purely enforced orders on other's bodies. An atrocious power that deprived people of freedom.
And that was devised by this woman on her own amongst despair and pain.
"Right now, this girl sees you as her dead sister. With a little bit of reinforcement on the brain, I can change what people see."
"...........!!"
"You see, this magic leaves the mind intact. Wonderful right. After all, if the mind is free it's not painful right? There is a meaning to smiling in midst of suffering that way."
Laugh Maker said while looking excitedly at Ikaruga's current state.
"Isu...ka..."
Holding the knife covered in ash, Ikaruga tearfully called the name of the sister she lost.
Rather than see herself stabbing Ouka, she saw Isuka instead.
Seeing her nemesis make her comrades taste the same feelings, murderous intent overflowed inside of Ouka.
A wound in the waist would be an instant death for a normal human being. One of her kidneys has turned into ash. Still, she couldn't help but stand up. She absolutely couldn't forgive the woman in front of her.
"That looks better. Still, it's not over yet?"
The moment Laugh Maker stroked her lips with a gleeful expression, the world Ouka saw changed completely.
The scenery of the testing experimental field that she has seen until now has collapsed like rust flaking off and remade into a new scenery. It turned into an ordinary house. In the living room there was a table, a sofa and a TV, before she noticed Ouka already stood up.

It was the sight she couldn't ever forget.
Two corpses lying on the ground and a carpet stained red with blood.
And——the figure of Laugh Maker embracing her little sister from behind.
"...why...!"
Laugh Maker responded to the dumbfounded Ouka's question.
"My magic has been already applied to you."
It must have been when she was stabbed by Ikaruga and fell to the ground, her cheek was touched then. That's when Laugh Maker had applied 『End Order』.
Right now, Ouka saw Ikaruga as her beloved little sister.
It was like a reproduction of her trauma. The events that were the beginning of all happened in front of her once again. Once again Ouka was at loss for words with the despair unfold in front of her, Laugh Maker floated the exactly same smile as she had back then.
"...stop..."
Realizing what Laugh Maker has thought of, Ouka spat a trembling voice.
"...stop it...!"
"No can do."
Rejecting her request, Laugh Maker laughed as if she was troubled.
And, Ouka's arm with a gun moved contrary to her own will.
The gun was——aiming at Ikaruga who had her little sister's appearance.
"If I do the same thing once again, you will no longer feel like capturing me alive, right?"
"..........!"
"When this girl dies, I think you will understand. That allowing Laugh Maker to exist would be a tragedy for any world there is, right?"
Inside of Ouka, feelings from the past revived. It was just like back then. No how she refused it, her body wouldn't listen. No matter how her mind refused it, she couldn't stop herself. She acted accordingly to the instructions the magic has sent. And in the end, Laugh Maker said.

" Laugh "

Her mind seemed to be swallowed by darkness, she fell into despair.
Will I taste that once again? Losing the meaning of life and barely clinging to life as a hammer of revenge. She had a boy who changed her way of life and comrades she could call friends. Just like her family in the past gave her warmth, her comrades have dissolved the ice on her heart.
Will I once again, deprive myself of it with my own hands? I don't want that!
"...uu...AAaaa...!"
Ouka bared her fangs and opposed Laugh Maker's orders. Using the entirety of a vampire's power she stiffened her muscles.
"I won't...lose anything...again...!!"
I definitely won't laugh. I absolutely won't kill. I'll show you, with my entire existence on the line. Wasn't it the same with Mephistopheles? My body is

my own. I won't give it to anyone. Living or dying, killing or not, laughing or not laughing, it's all up to me to decide.
"...so you will... oppose me that much huh."
Laugh Maker was surprised at Ouka's resistance. Never before, there was anyone who went against 『End Order』. What moved bodies wasn't mind nor soul, it were the nerves.
And seeing an existence that overturned that fact right in front of her, Laugh Maker couldn't believe it.
Envy appeared in her eyes. If she were to become such a noble person with a powerful heart, would her destiny change?
That's what Laugh Maker's eyes said. Smile disappeared from her face and she squinted looking at the palm of her hand.
"...if you were to be born with magic power dwelling within and I was born after you... I wonder if our positions would be reversed."
"...ghhhh!"
"I admit. It's as you say. I want to die. My memory was sealed and I started from a clean state... and was raised like a normal human. Laugh Maker's and mine personalities aren't separate. When my sealed memory was restored I didn't forget about growing up as Mimulus. Right now, I have a foundation of a normal human being."
Laugh Maker distorted her face towards Ouka, who desperately cut off the flow to her jaw.
Her lips were trembling and the big smile she had until now has vanished.
"That's why I can't stand it. What I have done makes me a simple murderer. I can't live while blaming Insect Cage. I'm scared of closing my eyelids. Every time I do that the hellish every day life and education revives. Reform after all that? Repent after all that? There's no way I can do that. I don't get it myself...! It's true that I feel happiness giving people death while they smile, and it's all true that I believe that they'll go to heaven! But it's also true that I feel it's sinful and wrong! Can you understand my suffering?! Can you understand my absolutely inconsistent feelings that make me act inconsistently?! They cling to me and won't let off! I absolutely can't forgive myself who received education and has memories of Laugh Maker!"
Laugh Maker confessed her feelings while shedding tears like crazy.
"If that time is reproduced once again, there's no way you won't kill me... right? Is that not so? Tell me it is so, please...!"
At wit's end, Laugh Maker shook her head.
She was definitely in a chaotic mental state. Her just self and the murderer self. The two that absolutely can't coexist in one person being there, must be nothing other than hell. The human called Mimulus Wallenstein must have received a proper education and was brought with love to the point where it's unacceptable for her to let her Laugh Maker self live.
However, Ouka didn't turn her ears deaf to her words. She just cut out what she didn't need to hear.

What a load of crap. What do you know of being a victim. A normal human? Don't make me laugh. That's comical. To think something would make me this sick. I know what Insect Cage did to her and that she was educated to become a murderer. I know very well that her mind was destroyed. But even so, that's no reason to forgive her.
She isn't a child, she isn't a madman no longer either.
She was blanked and raised with affection by her father.
Then——why did this woman continue as Laugh Maker?
The reason was so easy to see through it's funny.
While suffering an agony, Ouka lifted the corner of her mouth.
Very well. She wants me to laugh. How about I smile then.
"The possibility of me and you being in reverse is zero… normal human you said…? You're just weak…! You have no courage to repent, hoping for death is what a coward does!"
Even though her body didn't listen to her, making a facial expression she desperately insulted Laugh Maker.
"A decent person would atone for what they have done…! But what about you! You didn't make up nor oppose it, and on orders from above you dirtied your hands with murder haven't you! You have lost to the memories and experiences as Laugh Maker!"
"…uu… shut up… speak no more…!"
"In the end you never left Insect Cage…! If you thought what you have done was bad then you could have surrendered yourself! And yet, what you did was to further your misdeeds while hoping for judgement to come! Instead of stopping to sin after being blanked, you wanted to be judged by me! Just how cowardly are you! You didn't become Laugh Maker nor have you become Mimulus——just a criminal trash!!"
Caught off guard, Laugh Maker became speechless and stepped back.
She covered her face with both hands and hid the face that wouldn't smile.
And,
"——Laugh…! Laugh, laughlaughlaughlaughlaaaugggghhhhhhhhhhhh!"
From behind her fingers appeared the whites of her eyes, Laugh Maker's butterfly wings trembled and an enormous magical circle shining with white light has appeared.

——Bshh…!

Suddenly, the scenery Ouka was seeing turned black.
Her vision had turned completely dark. It was as if a TV was shut down, all of her five senses stopped working. Even though her soul struggled, she couldn't muster any strength.
Unable to hear even her own breathing in the darkness, Ouka struggled.

I can't let it end yet. I can't afford to fall. No. No no no no no no no.
I still haven't protected them. I promised everyone to survive until they came back.
Her memories from the past flashed back.
Faces of people important to her appeared in her mind.
Usagi, Ikaruga, Mari, her parents and little sister, and appearance of Takeru stretching his hand to her.
She stretched her hand to the disappearing illusion and cried in the darkness. No voice has come out, the freedom of her body didn't come back and while feeling like her mind too is being perpetrated she called his name.
"Takeru...!"
Even without any senses, she knew that tears are spilling from her eyes.
I want to meet him. Once again, I want to walk beside him.
I want to be together. I don't want to be alone. It's lonely.
Ever since he disappeared, whenever she was awake it was like that. No matter how she steeled herself to protect her comrades, it was like she had a hole in her chest and felt unbearably cold. She didn't think she would be this lonely without him.
"Take...ru...!"
Although she had a habit of putting on an act of being strong, only at times like this she was honest with herself. Pathetic. How inept she was.
In the end. At least in the end she wanted him to be beside her.
That's why, instead of calling for help, she just called his name.
"Take...ru...!"
Because she wanted him beside... she called his name.
"Takeru————!!"

"Ouka!"

——The boy responded to her wish.
The moment that voice has sounded, Ouka's five senses have returned and she saw the scenery enveloped in twilight flames.
And standing in the centre of shattered painful memories, was him.
Gallantly, ferociously, he descended to impale the magical circle on the ground with his sword.
The impact of landing stroked her cheek and shook her hair.
Everything was blown away in an instant. No, everything has been eaten.
Along with Laugh Maker's magic, the unbearably painful trauma has been eaten and exhausted by azure-coloured blade.
When the armoured knight pulled out the sword pierced into the floor, he aimed the sword's point at Laugh Maker and spoke to Ouka.
"...sorry, there was a delay."
With just that short sentence, Ouka finally realized that what she's seeing isn't a dream.

"Kusanagi...?"
"Yeah. It's me. I promised that I'll be beside you when you have your revenge."
"....."
"I'm glad that I made it."
Takeru smiled towards Ouka.
She felt like something heavy disappeared from her shoulders. Instead, something warm welled up inside of her chest. Feeling such relief, she thought of leaving her body to it and tears came out. After continuing a life of tension on the battlefield, the relief he brought was like a drug.
Her head was numb and she couldn't think normally. It was always like that. This man made everyone wait a long time, and rushed to save his comrades only when there was an emergency.
"...you're...sly."
With cheeks dyed red, she downcast her face that became unsightly because of tears and muttered.
"Why do you always time it perfectly for when others are weak..."
Wiping her tears embarrassed, despite being happy she blamed him.
And when she did, Takeru,
"Of course. When you're weak, I'll rush over from anywhere."
WIth his back turned to her, he said so earnestly. There was nothing Ouka could say any more. Right now, all she wanted was to leave everything to his back.
"...a comrade? Have you come to kill me as well?"
Laugh Maker who had her magic devoured and exhausted asked Takeru with a tired expression.
Takeru glared at Ouka's enemy with killing intent.
Feeling his killing intent, Laugh Maker's cheeks loosened as she felt ecstatic.
However, contrary to her expectations, Takeru withdrew the sword's point.
"I don't know what are you expecting, but I won't be the one to decide whether you die or not."
Realizing that Laugh Maker was seeking death, Takeru fell back behind Ouka.
Surprised, Ouka looked at his face.
He received her gaze from the front and nodded lightly.
"You decide."
"...Kusanagi."
Feeling pressure in his words, the gun in Ouka's hand trembled for a moment.
At the same time, irritation and rage mixed with each other in Laugh Maker.
"Stop it, that girl has no intention of killing me! If you're not going to kill me, I'll make you kill each other...! After that, I'll have the winner kill me!"

Hiding one of her eyes with one hand, Laugh Maker stroked her lips with the other.
A magical circle has appeared again and the 「End Order」 was executed.
"It's useless."
In response to Takeru's cold voice, twilight-coloured flame has filled the testing grounds.
—— 「Grant of GodslayingRagnarøkkr Enchant」 ——
The forbidden power nullifying, absorbing and consuming all magic of this world.
Laugh Maker's magic was burned and vanished before it could trigger. The magic from inside of the barrier generator was also exhausted and the flames rose up howling.
Predicting the activation of enchant, Vlad released Ouka's Vampire form and had the gun's disappear.
「"Khh... annoying Mistilteinn, if thou usest it then say so beforehand!」
Without any exceptions, this flame was also a natural enemy of Relic Eaters. Vlad was exposed to this flame before January and had suffered considerable damage as majority of his magical power was absorbed.
Amongst the flames, armour-clad Takeru glared at Laugh Maker with amber-coloured eyes.
"For 10 seconds from now on, you can't use magic. Stay quiet until your judgement comes."
Sentenced Laugh Maker shivered in the flames that seemed like they would burn even her soul.
"....."
Ouka pulled out the handgun she was familiar with from the holster at her leg and held its grip strongly.
She hesitated. If she allowed Laugh Maker to survive, what would have become of her family's chagrin? What about the tribute to the dead Spriggans and Pureblood Party members, as well as any other victims of hers? They were robbed of their lives in the most nefarious way. Then, wouldn't be giving their enemy death be the best funeral for them?
If she kills her, she will find self-satisfaction. No, in the first place, is killing Laugh Maker going to satisfy her? Will she be able to live a cheerful life? Surely, such a future wouldn't come. Even if her wounds are healed, she would feel occasional tingling in her dreams, and she would also harbour half-hearted feelings if she left her alive too.
Then... it's better to...
Ouka pulled back half of her body and tried to aim the muzzle at Laugh Maker with trembling hand. That's when Takeru's hand gently overlapped with hers as if to embrace it.
Snuggling up close to her, he poised the same gun.
"Surely, there's no 'correct' here... it was the same for me. No matter which one you choose it'll be painful. But don't lie to your heart. It's not for someone else, but for yourself. Ouka, what do you want to do?"

"...what I want..."
"I leave the aim to you, but——"
While still looking straight at the enemy, Takeru told Ouka.
"I'll pull the trigger."
Feeling warmth of his overlapped hand, tears spilled from her eyes.
Takeru intended to keep his promise to of shouldering half the burden.

Ouka buried her face in his chest slightly and smiled sadly.

And she overlapped her finger with Takeru's finger on the trigger.
"I want to do it together."
"....."
"I don't want half. I want everything together. From now on forever... I want to shoulder anything and everything together."
"....."
"Everything... together with you."
Takeru nodded in response to Ouka's teary expression.
Then the two aimed together——and squeezed the trigger together.

Epilogue

Mari, Kanaria and Usagi continued to defend the fifth laboratory's entrance by smoothly repelling the enemy, but because enemy forces were dispersed they couldn't find time to rest.

"Geez, there's no end to it! Is there any contact from Takeru?!"

"For a while now magical communication stopped going through. It's probably because laboratory is made with anti-magic material."

"There is no contact with Ootori either..."

"Aw come on! There's too many of them no matter how you look at it...!"

As Mari spat out curses while firing Aurora Barrage, Kanaria agreed with her.

"I've heard that that EXE's captain is fighting. He should be taking them down with crazy momentum. This number of HeroesEinherjars looks more like a regiment. The enemy shouldn't have this many mass-produced Magical Dragoons."

Mari protested and clicked her tongue, and then concentrated on the battle. She expanded an auroral halo and took off into the sky, it was when she tried to wipe out a group of enemies on the ground.

Suddenly, something like a laser has poured down on the Einherjars from far away.

"...eh?"

"?! Mari?! Hey, I've was caught up with that!"

Kanaria's surprised voice reached Mari through the wireless.

"Y-you're wrong. That wasn't me."

When she shook her head denying, Kanaria suddenly caught a breath.

"——!! Usagi! Mari! Come here and hide!"

As she was told to, Mari slipped into the shade of rubble where Kanaria was hiding.

After a slight delay, Usagi also came.

"What is it...?"

"What happened? Aren't we protecting the entrance?"

When the two asked her, Kanaria looked up through a gap in the rubble towards the sky, annoyed.

"There's a nasty feeling... Lævateinn is crying..."

While moving her ears, Kanaria said so uncomfortably.When Mari focused and started to feel the waves of magical power, she felt something fly towards them from far away.

"! ...what...is this magical power...disgusting..."

Feeling the wave of magic Mari held her mouth to stop her urge to vomit.

At the same time there was a sound of something flying in the sky.

When Kanaria and Mari looked up to the sky squinting, the saw many humanoid figures of the same type. They weren't Dragoons, they were humans.

Their number increased with every moment.

At the same time, sounds of combat came from all over the battlefield.
Usagi looked through the gun's scope at the figures.
"...are those... Relic Eaters?"
They were humans clad in iron-coloured armours. Their appearance was the same as Takeru's and Ouka's, as well as Kyouya's and the others Witch Hunt form. She thought that they might be EXE personnel, but that wasn't the case. Because the amount of people flying in the sky clad in the same body armour was several dozens, and the guns they used to slaughter the Einherjars and Mechanical Dragons was different from Relic Eaters regular EXE members had.
When she squinted, she saw 「The Malleus Maleficarum Production Model “Guillotine”」 engraved on the gun's surface.
"...mass-produced Relic Eaters. I've heard a rumour that Inquisition is making those. Fantasy CultValhalla also investigated it but... they completed it huh."
Kanaria said meekly.
"Mass-produced you say but... can such a thing be done?"
"There's no way it can with any decent methods, you can tell by looking at Mari."
Just as Kanaria said, Mari placed a hand on her head with a pale face.
"What's this... the sound of magical power feels like a screams of many people... this... I never felt anything like it."
"Surely, it was Alchemist that made it. So it was true that they joined Inquisition after all."
Kanaria clenched her teeth in annoyance.
Some of the Inquisitors clad in mass-produced type were hovering in the air near Mari and others.
Hearing faint voices, Kanaria set up her ears.
"...did you find them?"
"No. However, the 35th Test Platoon seemed to have headed here. They should be in this area. Find them."
"The one to be arrested with top priority is Kusanagi Takeru right? What about the others from platoon?"
"There are orders to capture Suginami Ikaruga and Nikaido Mari as well. They don't seem to care about the others."
"...damn, why is my first job after entering EXE capturing rebels. Even though after all this time I finally sortied with a Relic Eater..."
"Don't complain. Do your job."
After finishing the conversation, Inquisitors flew away scattering around.
"We're joining up with Takeru——these guys are out here to catch us. We need to hurry and run away."
Realizing the situation is more urgent than they thought, Usagi and Mari were embraced by anxiety.

Ouka stood on the testing grounds after everything was over.

"....."
Ikaruga was safe and the barrier generator was neutralized by Takeru's 【Grant of GodslayingRagnarøkkr Enchant】.
There was nothing left in here. Her revenge was over.
"....."
Yes, Ouka's revenge was over.
In the end, Ouka didn't kill Laugh maker and chose to let her live.
Laugh Maker was shot in her leg and was struggling like a caterpillar on the floor.
Ouka coldly looked down at her figure.
"...whyy...? Why... didn't you kill mee..."
"....."
"I don't want this any more. I shouldn't exist in this world... why...! Give it a rest and end this already... how long do I have to harbour these kinds of thoughts?"
Her face wet with tears and blood was incredibly pathetic.
The reason she didn't commit suicide until now was probably because she understood that would be running away. As an evil, she should be finished by a victim. She thought that if she's judged by a human who has a right to do so, her sins would disappear.
But Ouka wouldn't allow that kind of idea. If suicide was running away, then seeking judgement by hands of others was also running away. Above all, there were victims she killed in order to become hated.
In the end, in order to atone this woman involved and killed others.
That definitely wasn't a normal human's way of thinking.
There wasn't any smile on Laugh Maker's face any longer, she stared at the ceiling with despair.
And unexpectedly, she stuck out her tongue between her teeth.
Ouka opened her eyes widely seeing the movement she expected and put her fingers in Laugh Maker's mouth.
When she stopped her suicide, Laugh Maker shed tears. Ouka's expression didn't move despite feeling pain as her fingers were bitten and looked down at Laugh Maker.
Then, she loudly spoke to Vlad.
"Vlad, I have a request."
【"Say it."】
"Once again... just for a moment, I want you to turn me into Vampire form."
Hearing Ouka's request, Vlad went silent for a moment.
Vlad realized what Ouka was thinking to do.
【"Is that fine. If you do that, dirty blood will enter your body."】
"...it's okay. I should be able to bear this much. They say that curses always come back to their roots after all."
【"...hmph, laughable. Don't say what you don't really think."】
Caught off guard by Vlad's accurate guess, Ouka smiled wryly.

"Revenge is something unsightly... however, I think that kind of fate is fitting for this woman."
Very well, saying just that Vlad turned Ouka's body into Vampire form.
Spreading crimson wings, she covered Laugh Maker's body.
The only thing that entered Laugh Maker's field of view were wings of crimson shade and Ouka's blue eyes.
While Laugh Maker trembled in fear, feeling like screaming, Ouka opened her mouth wide. Among the beautifully lined up teeth, there were exceptionally sharp fangs.
Ouka——pressed those fangs against Laugh Maker's neck and sank into it.
"Ah, gh...uu!"
While a small groan arose, Ouka sucked her blood. The moment blood entered her body, both Laugh Maker's and Mimulus' memories mingled inside of her head.
"....."
It were incredibly painful memories. The heartbreaking pain and sadness was in them.
But Ouka satisfied herself with that pain.
Even as she tasted the same memories, Ouka's soul wasn't hurt.
Ouka wasn't as weak as Laugh Maker was. There was a difference in quality, but she had already tasted this much pain.
She wove magic into the process of sucking blood, making up a contract.
Only usable by vampires, a contract between master and the slave.
Those who have their blood sucked by a vampire, become vampires as well.
That was the legend everyone knew. True Ancestors and the Apostles. An abominable contract building master and slave relationship. Vampires were called kings of fantastical organisms because of this power to reproduce.
This contract had more binding force than Enforcement End Order.
When Ouka raised her fangs again, Laugh Maker writhed in pain as her body was being remade into that of a vampire. Once again, Ouka stared down at Laugh Maker's suffering.
"...you have now become my servant. You can no longer go against me nor choose the way you live or die. You will be bound by a pledge of not being able to take any life in this world. Of course, including your own."
"...?! Tha...t's..."
"At the same time, if you ever try to forget your crimes, every time your memory will be relived in the same way you made me remember my hatred. You can no longer escape from sin."
Basking in despair is what would perfectly describe the current Laugh Maker.
As if she was sinking into darkness, her expressions stiffened and convulsions ran through her cheek.
Ouka coldly watched her despair and quietly turned around after a moment.
She released the Vampire form and making sound footsteps she headed to the testing ground's exit.

"Live forever... this is my revenge against you."
"……uu…aaaaAAA."
"I'll be always watching you——Mimulus Wallenstein."
Ouka no longer called her 'Laugh Maker'.
All that was left was a wreck. A pathetic sinner that has no choice but to live crushed by her sin. Laugh Maker has died. She no longer exists.
Giving her eternal suffering has fulfilled Ouka's revenge.
"……."
Stretching her back, Ouka walked in silence with a strong pace.
Behind her, there was Mimulus screaming and wailing. Crying like a child she begged them to kill her. She apologized to the people she has killed so far and yelled apologies to Ouka, also... she begged her deceased adoptive father for help.
"……."
Ouka clasped her fist, clenched her teeth and shook off that voice from her head.
She walked facing forward. She walked desperately facing downwards. It was just as Takeru said, whether she kills her or not, choosing either is hard, painful.
Nevertheless, she had to make a choice. No matter how pathetic the opponent was, she couldn't be forgiven. She wouldn't be satisfied with an ending where she doesn't have her revenge.
That is why she received this pain and heartbreaking cries——
——And shouldering it all, Ouka moved forward.

After letting Ikaruga down on the floor by the entrance to the testing grounds, Takeru waited for Ouka to come.
In the end, Ouka didn't kill her enemy and after firing her gun she asked Takeru to leave her alone with Laugh Maker. Takeru offered to stay with her, but Ouka shook her head rejecting it.
What I'm going to do now is hideous, she said.
"This is the last time... I shoulder something alone.
As Ouka gently laughed, Takeru couldn't insist any more strongly than he had already.
Feeling noise in his chest, he waited for Ouka restlessly.
The doors of the testing grounds opened a few minutes after that. Takeru raised his face and rushed to Ouka.
"Ouka..."
Holding her head down, she nodded.
Takeru placed a hand on her shoulder and sighed.
"...it's over right, with this..."
That's great, is what he couldn't say. He was familiar with emptiness of revenge.
While Takeru hesitated not knowing what to say to her, suddenly Ouka laughed quietly.

"Fufu... 'Ouka' 'Ouka', I've told you to call me by my name right?"
"...sorry. Somehow, I've rode on the flow and called you that."
"No, Ouka is fine. I would be happy if you called me so from now on."
Ouka let out a breath and corrected her posture by putting a hand on her hip.
"Now then, Saionji was supposed to protect the entrance. We need to pick her up."
She said so clearly and passed by Takeru.
"Kusanagi, can you carry Suginami? You're stronger than I am, and above all Suginami would be happy if she was carried by you."
Raising her index finger she spoke to Takeru with her back faced to him.
Her voice was cheerful.
"Oh right, is Nikaido Mari safe? No, I want to confirm whether that impudent woman is alive, while she definitely is invariably vulgar, I still would like to know if she's alive."
Turning talkative, she spoke to Takeru.
Takeru downcast his eyes sadly and moved closer to Ouka.
"Ah, both Saionji and Suginami did well on this side. In fact, when you left AntiMagic Academy, I was made temporary captain. Being a captain was... very difficult. Although there were Inquisitors here, people didn't have experience and struggled a lot. I can tell now how hard it is on you——"
"——Enough. I know that already."
Suddenly, Takeru pulled Ouka's hand and pulled her to his chest.
Powerlessly Ouka entrusted her weight to Takeru and remained still in his embrace.
"What an idiot... just now you said we'll do everything together forever."
"....."
"Don't act tough at times like this... you might say you want to be alone, but I also wanted to be with you. I came here in order to shoulder everything."
"....."
"That's why, please don't try to endure it."
Forcefully embraced, Ouka raised her face.
She cried. With tear-filled eyes, she cried like a lost child.
Seeing Ouka more feeble than he ever saw her, Takeru's heart tightened.
She took off the armour of revenge, what he saw now was the real Ouka.
"——.....I don't...feel refreshed at all...even having my revenge... didn't give me any sense of accomplishment..."
With sobs mingled in, Ouka spoke what how she felt.
"I've always dreamed of it...then why is it so empty? Why does my chest feel so empty? I've always did my best...a-and I was able to properly finish it...why is it...?"
Even though his face was dyed with sorrow, Takeru continued to hug Ouka.
"Why is it...so painful...Takeru...!"
Takeru didn't deny revenge. He didn't think it's pointless. However, *it was a fact that emptiness remained afterwards.*

"You see, Ouka… even if you shot your enemy, you wouldn't be able to see your parents and little sister. Even if you dispel your family's chagrin, you have to continue living on."
Taking revenge wouldn't revive the dead.
But, he couldn't say revenge was meaningless. Fulfilling one's revenge and starting from blank state, one could walk forward not bothered by hatred.
"Don't worry. I'm with you. Even if you say you don't want me to, I'll walk beside you. That's what I promised you."
"…uu…uuu…uu…"
"All of us comrades are together. You might not have your family no longer, but you have us."
"…uwaa…aa…"
"I——won't let your revenge end with just emptiness."
A dam inside of Ouka collapsed.
The tears she shed up until now, were tears she scolded herself with.
But now, there was no need to endure. With the dam no longer there, Ouka wept.
She raised her voice, dyed her heart with sorrow and without restraint she sank her face in Takeru's chest.
Takeru embraced her earnestly.
Ouka looked up at him with eyes full of tears and spoke with a warm tone of voice,
"Takeru… I'm really glad that you're beside me…"
Leaving behind words that made Takeru sincerely happy, Ouka fell asleep on spot out of exhaustion.

"Takeruu!"
When Mari called him, Takeru moved his gaze to the other side of the corridor.
In the end, not moving at all from the posture he was in, he stood there waiting for Mari and the others to come.
Pulled by Kanaria and Usagi, Mari came over from the dark hallway.
Although Mari and Usagi had smiles on their faces at first, as they moved closer they started staring wide-eyed.
" "……" "
"O-oh. Great, you came inside… the magic communication wasn't reaching outside so I was in a bind. Any injuries? Are you okay?"
" "……what is this." "
Mari and Usagi pointed at Takeru's arms.
In wryly smiling Takeru's arms embrace there was Ouka snuggling up to him like a cat. She was sleeping loudly while burying her face in his chest.
"No, this is… um… when the fight was over and I came she fell asleep… or… something?"
As he articulated that poorly, Mari and Usagi clicked their tongues in unison.

Only Kanaria stood there with a stern expression.
"R-rather than that, we need to hurry up and escape, right? We need to go through an underpass until we reach the place we meet with Student Council President. Mari, can you guide us? Usagi, be cautious of enemies."
"...I don't mind, but you better remember this when we get back."
"Agreed. I shall firmly pursue this matter afterwards so prepare yourself."
The two's gaze and voices were serious. For the first time in a while he felt stomach pain.
While smiling wryly, Takeru looked at Kanaria who was standing with a grim expression. Kanaria was glaring at Ikaruga who fainted by the corridor's end.
"....."
What was swirling in her eyes was probably hatred. Without a doubt, she hated Ikaruga who escaped alone from Alchemist, leaving Isuka and her behind.
However, Takeru believed that hatred wasn't the only thing inside of her heart.
"...Kanaria, can you carry Ikaruga?"
When he said so, Kanaria looked towards him in annoyance.
"For Kana to carry this woman...? Takeru, are you crazy?"
"Yeah, please."
After he responded with a straight face, Kanaria looked sideways, frowning.
"You can hear everything from her after we safely escape from here. Right now, the top priority is escaping. There is no one else who can carry her other than you."
Being told the truth directly, Kanaria's eyes shook faintly.
".....Kanaria."
Takeru called her name once again, she frowned and closed her eyes.
She spaced out for a few moments and then shook her hair with a hand.
"I get it... I just need to do it, right."
Kanaria said with a self-important tone of voice and carried Ikaruga on her shoulders. As expected of an elf, she lightly lifted the considerably tall Ikaruga.
Relieved, Takeru spoke to everyone of the future plans.
"All right... let's go. First we need to ensure out safety. And then——"
When he was about to give orders to all members.
"Don't move——Kusanagi Takeru."
A heavy fear-inducing voice sounded, calling Takeru's name.
Trembling in fear along with the other members, he turned towards the source.
From the darkness on the other side came out a man with a revolver.
It was Kurogane Hayato. As if to prevent platoon from leaving, he moved closer to them.
"Where do you think you're going. You're wanted now. You're accused of jailbreak and assisting a fugitive. Also, of treason against Inquisition."

His voice and his speech made it seem as if he embodied the law.
Unpleasant sweat ran down Takeru's cheek.
"...I admit I broke out of jail and assisted a fugitive. But I don't intend to rebel yet."
"I know. These charges are just sophistry. It's meaningless garbage."
Hearing surprising words, Takeru frowned.
"Then why... are you standing in front of us."
"Because your existence is too dangerous for enemy or dissidents to get their hands on."
"That's why you'll capture me? As an Inquisitor, you will deliver me to Inquisition?"
"Wrong. As an Inquisitor, I'm going to protect your existence."
Being told he'll be protected, Takeru felt more and more surprised.
"I'll say frankly. Discard Mistilteinn. Even if you're bound by a bond with that sword, on top of there being people who want to use that fact, it's dangerous by itself. As an Inquisitor, I request you to disarm yourself."
What Hayato said was correct. But Takeru answered clearly.
"I refuse. I have no intention of discarding Lapis, and I have no intention of being used by anyone."
"....."
"I'll act accordingly to my own thinking. That is all."
When he stated that seriously, Hayato quietly closed his eyes.
"...I see. Then I'll stop you forcefully."
During the moment everyone was horrified, Hayato assumed Witch Hunter form.
Takeru hurriedly put Ouka down on the ground and holding his sword he immediately assumed Witch Hunt form as well.
Both of them glared at each other, intending to start a fierce battle once again.
That's when they suddenly heard the testing ground's doors open.
When everyone's gaze shifted there, they could see a total of 20 KnightsSpriggans.
Almost all of them were injured and they looked exhausted.
"...you guys."
When Hayato asked, the man bandaged up to the top of his head saluted.
"All of us belong to fifth line of defence's seventh company... captain Kurogane."
Twenty Spriggans passed in droves beside Takeru and others, and stood between 35th platoon and Hayato.
As if to protect the platoon members, the Spriggans confronted Hayato.
"What are you doing."
"Please let these children go. We were saved by these children."
When the man in front said that, others called to Hayato one after another.
"They're comrades that fought together with us on this battlefield." "They saved our lives many times." "We ate meals from the same pot. Please

overlook them." "Please capture me instead." "I won't forsake my comrades."
Everyone's voice felt compelling.
"E-everyone..."
Usagi stared at everyone's backs with tears in her eyes.
Takeru was surprised that Usagi and the others made so many allies on this battlefield, and was proud of them. Unlike during their school life where they were ridiculed as Small Fry Platoon, on the battlefield people made bonds of blood.
In front of the Spriggans who lowered their heads earnestly, Hayato didn't even flinch.
After about a dozen seconds, Hayato finally breathed out.
And closing his eyes once, he quietly lowered his muzzle.
Honestly speaking, Takeru was surprised to see that aspect of him. Ouka said before that Hayato was someone who did take his subordinates feelings in consideration, but despite that he never allowed it to change his decision.
In the flurry of words of gratitude, Hayato opened his eyes again and glared at Takeru.
"Remember this, Kusanagi Takeru. Leaving Inquisition means turning the world into your enemy. It might be that I too will fight you. Despite that, are you going to join the dissidents?"
"...I don't know yet. But I won't listen to Inquisition no longer. I want to save my little sister, and don't want my comrades to be used by Chairman any more."
"....."
"Whether I win or not is not the problem. For those important to me, I will fight even the entire world."
Stating his resolution, Takeru embraced Ouka against his chest again.
Seeing that appearance of his, Hayato's expression seemed a little bit nostalgic.
It might have been Takeru's imagination. Hayato who didn't show any emotions never looked this human before. It was as if he saw his former self... it said 'I wish I was similar to him'.
Hayato turned around on his heel quietly,
"——Go. This is the last time I protect you all."
Saying so, he left Takeru and the others.
Takeru lowered his head deeply in Hayato's direction.
After saying their thanks and farewells to the Spriggans, Takeru and the others hurried to the underpass.
They didn't know what was waiting ahead of them.
What was the actual condition of the dissidents. What will be the fate of war between Valhalla and Inquisition. And what was going on with Kiseki right now.
Their destination was filled with darkness.
However,

"Let's go everyone! ——Run!"
Takeru no longer hesitated. He decided to resist along with his comrades.
Even if what waited for them ahead, was a tragedy.

□□□

In the corridor of Alchemist's first laboratory Ootori Sougetsu walked with an unusually strong pace.
What could be felt from his fierce footsteps wasn't irritation, but joy.
Chasing him right beside, breathing roughly was Suginami Suzaku.
Looking at her sideways, Sougetsu grinned.
"See, he came back right? I win the bet again."
Seeing Sougetsu boast, Suzaku seriously chagrined and stomped her feet like a child.
"Kiii! It's unfair! Last time too no matter which one I chose it would be chairman's win right? Also, even though Kusanagi Takeru came back, in the end he escaped hasn't he."
"Ha ha ha, that's fine. Whether he is my ally or enemy, as long as he comes back he will definitely come back to me. After all I have his beloved little sister."
Seeing Sougetsu laugh cheerfully Suzaku pouted.
"This battle too, went accordingly to your speculations... that's not interesting. Can you see the future?"
"……♪"
Sougetsu smiled meaningfully and hummed a song waving his finger like a baton.
"I've received the report about Laugh Maker's case. Surely, that was beyond your expectations? Actually, I'd rather if Ouka-san killed her instead."
"Nn?! It's fine. That thing can't do anything now even if we leave it alone. Elizabeth surely sent her to the battlefield in order to harass me, there is no need for that bastard madman to speak of the truth. Those who speak of the truth all die like Red Glare has."
Looking at Sougetsu from the profile as he lightly moved his fingers, Suzaku made an amazed expression.
"You're a scary person. Your adoptive daughter... if she knew that you were the perpetrator who allowed Laugh Maker's escape and made her massacre your daughter's family, what kind of expression would she make I wonder."
Sougetsu half-opened his eyes and his mouth distorted making up a crescent shape.
Accepting that smile as an answer, Suzaku shrugged and raised her hands.
Sougetsu walked forward. Step by step without hurrying, he took firm steps as if to destroy the ground.

The fingertip he waved like a baton drew lines, and finally, he swung it vertically as if cutting something.
"Noow then——"
With his eyes craving for chaos, he stood in front of huge doors.
On the other side of the door was the level 8 lab.
The subject researched inside of it——was Hyakki Yakou.
The heavy doors opened automatically.
Seeing the sight on the other side, Sougetsu smiled like a Cheshire cat.

"——From here on it's the real thing."

Afterword

Long time no see. I'm Yanagimi Touki.
The seventh volume, did you enjoy it? Since it's serious talk, my stomach won't calm down. I'm always firing heavy ones, but this time the story was about the platoon members who were left in the outside world.
At the same time, it's the story of 'Revenge'.
Ouka had to make a choice similarly to how Takeru did in the fifth volume. There was no correct answer to the problem, was there. Killing not always equals revenge. But if she doesn't kill, the dark feelings inside of her won't disappear. And surely, whichever she chooses it will result with 'emptiness'.
But for Ouka, there was no option of 'not taking revenge'.
She chose to bear the emptiness. But she is no longer alone. Surely from now on, she will walk forward along with her comrades.
Eh? But somehow, the grey-haired old man's state is... let's leave that for the next volume.

Now then, frmo here on I'd like to migrate into talk about big boobs, but I have something to report.
First, I was allowed to the 'AntiMagic Academy 35th Test Platoon's' short story in Dragon Magazine. You who thinks 'this series is full of brutality' and has a stomach ache! Yes you there who thought "Even though he talks about boobs in afterwords, there's no boobs at all appearing in the book!".
It shall be prepared for your sake! Something like a love comedy swimsuits flirting and platoon's everyday life, that kind of stomach healing medicine! Look forward to it!

Now, the second one but also important announcement.
It will probably be written on the wrapping but,
「AntiMagic Academy 35th Test Platoon」's

Anime project is under way!

It's not April fools. I'm serious.
Since I was informed about it two days before writing this afterword, I'm surprised myself. I really appreciate it. I'm sincerely glad for continuing this far.
But well, since it's in the planning stage, 'there's no need to panic', that's how it feels. Regarding the anime form, it would be best if you waited for further news.
But I'm really happy. The possibility of seeing moving Takeru and Ouka has become very high.
I can't confirm it accurately, but I'll do my best in the future as well, I humbly leave this 「AntiMagic Academy 35th Test Platoon」 in your care.

Now then, the customary acknowledgements.
S-sama who is responsible for me and always points out things with precision. Kippu-sama who was fired over the amount of character designs this time. Hanao Sutarou-sensei who always thoroughly draws actions in the manga version. Everyone in Fujimi Shoubo who backed me up in various aspects.
And, all those who have took this book in their hands, my greatest thanks. I will still continue. Look forward to eight volume!

Yanagimi Touki

Translator Notes and References

1. ↑ Yes, it says Shinmeiji Reima, even the kanji is different, as well as furigana. Previously he was called □□□□□, in this volume he's being called □□□□□. Furigana was changed accordingly.